



# FINANCIAL CLARITY AND EFFICIENCY FOR THE WIN AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

**GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY HAS FOUND WAYS TO STREAMLINE PROCESSES, IMPROVE VISIBILITY INTO SPENDING, AND SMOOTH VENDOR RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SAP CONCUR SOLUTIONS.**

**F**OR OVER A DECADE, George Washington University has leveraged technology from SAP Concur solutions to support spend management. Starting with travel and expense management, the school has steadily expanded its use cases to include the management of invoices and purchase orders.

Most recently, the university scaled its use of these tools to the Medical Faculty Associates, or MFA. In the following Q&A, Shelley Shearer, Director of University Payables, and Donna Ginter, Associate Vice President of Supply Chain, discuss how modernized financial management systems are making a difference at GWU.



**Can you give us a quick history of GWU's use of SAP Concur solutions? Where did you start off, and how did the use cases expand?**

**Donna Ginter:** GWU started with SAP Concur solutions as part of an RFP to implement an integrated travel and expense system. We went live with Concur Travel before Concur Expense due to a lot of system integration requirements for the expense component.

**Shelley Shearer:** Before that, we were completely paper-driven with large stacks of paper on desks. We went live with Concur Expense and mandated its use for all employees going forward. No pilot phases were used — we just went “live.” Then in 2019, we added a Concur Invoice pilot in a phased approach to automate our accounts payable process.

**You've recently started leveraging these tools in support of the Medical Faculty Associates, or MFA. Who makes up that user base, and why did they need a new approach to financial management?**

**DG:** The Medical Faculty Associates is a practice of doctors in a variety of disciplines, along with the staff that support the various practices. They are faculty and part of the GWU system when they have research grants and courseloads. But when they move over into a doctor's office and they're practicing the medicine that they teach at GWU, they become part of the Medical Faculty Associates, which is a separate affiliate.

Instead of having the MFA stand alone, GWU decided it would bring them back in under the university umbrella to give greater support to them. The most efficient way of doing that was for GWU to share its financial infrastructure with the Medical Faculty Associates, which was itself a much smaller organization than the university. And the MFA was more than happy to move: They knew that they had some issues with their financial system that didn't allow for great reporting or visibility into spend or reimbursements. And they really wanted to use SAP Concur solutions for travel and expense management.

**Let's talk about visibility. What can the MFA see that they couldn't before, and why does it matter?**

**SS:** SAP Concur solutions has given them the ability to see the whole spectrum of their invoices. We're using Concur Invoice Capture for the invoices coming in, where they're assigned, who they're with. They can see the entire process of who they



go to for approval. We can now benchmark how long things are taking with certain people or departments. They're able to see everything from start to finish. This makes supplier relationships better because things aren't being held up by paper invoices going through a process.

They also have access to the Concur Request tool for forms and applications.

**Can you give some specific examples of how these new processes have benefited the MFA, or the university in general? What specifically does this enable?**

**DG:** We gave them the ability to instruct their vendors to send the invoices into the Invoice Capture website. The folks at the MFA embraced the use of Invoice Capture right up front; they've even put that requirement within the signatures that they have on their e-mail addresses. When they speak to the vendor community, the vendors know right away: "If I have an invoice, I'm sending it into Capture." Six months into the transition at this point, it is far better than anything we've seen before.

**SS:** Now that we have all these audit rules built in, it helps us with getting things in a timely manner. We're very strong on going as automated as possible. Prior to going into SAP Concur solutions we were at about a 60% electronic...and the rest was all manually keyed. And now we're at about a 98% electronic.



**A lot of universities wrestle with purchase order management in particular. How does your approach simplify all that?**

**DG:** What we're able to do is determine what can and cannot be processed with a purchase order. We have a lot of exemptions to purchase orders that grant us flexibility in how we use the SAP Concur system. We're able to require POs for certain things that have documentation requirements — federal funds and grants and things that require competition.

We have options on how to process a request for payment. We can put it directly into SAP Concur and then can cut a check. We can use procurement cards, and ultimately the transaction runs through SAP Concur. Purchase order management has become easier for us.

**You've also been a paperless environment for the longest time. How does SAP Concur solutions support that?**

**DG:** GWU took a look at Concur Request and said: "Hey, this is a great tool. How can we use this to remove paperwork?" We have taken paper documents such as the procurement card application form and placed that form online through the Concur Request module. Someone now will go into SAP Concur and place a request for a Payment Card that is built from the information within their Concur profile. It then uses workflow within SAP Concur to routes for approvals and ends up with the P-Card office, where the form is extracted and then sent off to the card provider for creation.

**SS:** One example is that we were, for the longest time, requesting itemized receipts for anything \$35 and under. We were able to move that up to \$75 and under, based on doing a mass review of a year's worth of spend to see what those small dollar items are and what kind of risk they presented. SAP Concur solutions easily provided us the needed detail and data from which we could build our case for the change.

**How do these tools help to drive policies and procedures — both to shape them, and to enforce them?**

**SS:** We use reporting quite a bit to determine where we want to move forward and where we have issues. We use it to determine what departments might need more training or refresher training. It also helps us determine our audit rules.

**What's ahead? Any future plans for further**



SAP CONCUR SOLUTIONS SUPPORT A PAPERLESS ENVIRONMENT

**expansion of your SAP Concur implementations?**

**SS:** We are very game to be as electronic as possible, to use AI and get away from every manual concept we can. In Concur Request we have a "form" to use when making corrections between accounts. Currently we only use that for our education side, and I'd really like to see the grant side go through that as well.

We want to streamline our invoice processing, to see where we can make that flow through much quicker. We're also adding employees to our expense pay program. We really try and use all of the SAP Concur solutions that we can.

**DG:** We run Concur Expense and we run Concur Invoice, and those are two separate modules. We are looking to see what we can do to blend the two systems, to make sure that we catch invoice payments that potentially could be duplicates prior to the payment being made. We're pretty good at catching them after the fact, if they occur — which is rare — but we'd like to catch them beforehand. That's what's on the horizon for us.

*This interview was edited for brevity. You can hear the entire conversation with George Washington University's Donna Ginter and Shelley Shearer on Campus Technology's Viewpoint podcast. Click [here](#) for that episode.*



# MODERNIZING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT FOR HIGHER ED

**SAP CONCUR IS MORE THAN JUST A TRAVEL AND EXPENSE TOOL. HERE'S HOW IT CAN SUPPORT THE MANY FACETS OF FINANCIALS AT YOUR INSTITUTION.**

**S**AP CONCUR IS WIDELY KNOWN as a travel and expense (T&E) management tool. But for higher education, this modernized solution can do a lot more — enhancing processes around invoicing, purchase orders and check writing, as well as supporting sound financial governance.

We talked with Tony DeNardo, Principal Solutions Consultant, and Jim Cambray, Senior Director of Sales for Higher Education at SAP Concur, about some of the ways in which higher education is leveraging the technology to support improved financial management.



## Where do universities struggle, when it comes to financial management?

**Jim Cambray:** Universities in general are faced with financial pressures not seen in their history before. Even before COVID, enrollments were declining, state and federal funding was also on the decline, and they were just having challenges around online learning, changing the dynamic of higher education.

Part of the challenge of managing financials is that institutions don't have expansive IT resources and departments and teams just waiting to take on a major year-long project for some back-office improvements. This means that many schools are operating outdated and paper-based processes in the financial side of the house, particularly in the invoice and payables process.

**Tony DeNardo:** With the paper and manual processes that universities struggle with today, they lack visibility into where things are in the process. All of that ties to timely payments to suppliers, where institutions can be missing discounts or have penalties. From the rebates perspective, there are missed opportunities, too.

## COVID made this even more complicated for many schools. What were some of the impacts?

**TD:** When COVID first hit, faculty and staff were pushed out of the working environment. Yet people from AP were having to come on to campus and manage a paper process: They had to ensure that their checks were run, and all of this potentially caused delays.

**JC:** COVID really shed light on some of the inefficient processes at many universities. As we mentioned earlier, schools are still awash in paper-based, outdated back-office processes, particularly on the invoice and payable side. They're now asking, how can they digitize their financial processes to support these remote environments?

## What can SAP Concur solutions offer for higher ed, beyond just travel and expense? What does it mean to have comprehensive visibility?

**JC:** If you think about the thousands or tens of thousands of PO and non-PO invoices, check requests that are floating around campus on any given day, you see a lot of spend and a lot of information that is difficult to capture. Comprehensive

COMPREHENSIVE  
VISIBILITY ALLOWS  
DATA TO APPEAR  
IN SYSTEMS IN  
REAL TIME



visibility to us means having all of that data appear in your system in near real time, so the campuses can then make strategic financial decisions based on an accurate representation of all your financial data.

**TD:** They're looking to automate a workflow. They're looking to apply business rules and get visibility into spend — not just vendor spend, but bottlenecks and delays in the process, to help ensure those timely payments to suppliers. SAP Concur is really about providing visibility into all things, beginning to end.

## What are some of the specific features within SAP Concur solutions that bring this to life?

**TD:** We leverage tech like optical character recognition or OCR capabilities, AI and machine learning to help get rid of the paper and automate that process into the workflow, dynamically routing those invoices, those check requests, to the appropriate approvers, and applying the business rules for visibility and insight to compliance.

**JC:** Controllers and CFOs now have immediate visibility and reporting into all spend on campus. They can look across all invoice and expense spend in one easy-to-use platform. They now have invoice processes in days versus weeks or months in many cases.



## Comprehensive visibility in turn drives deeper insights. Can you share a few examples of what universities can learn through these tools?

**TD:** For institutions, that could be visibility into their vendor spend, who are their primary vendors, where dollars are going, allowing institutions to be able to look and find ways to consolidate that spend, to maximize opportunities such as rebates or payment discounts with specific vendors.

It's also about providing that visibility into bottlenecks in the workflow: identifying where invoices are waiting to be approved, where they're potentially going to be causing future delays.

## Mobility is key to your offering. How does it work and why does it matter?

**TD:** Mobility can take a number of different aspects depending on how you look at it. For some business, it is simply getting rid of paper through the invoice capture process, leveraging the optical character recognition and AI and machine learning to intelligently lift the data off of the invoice and allowing the ability to automate that workflow and approval process from their mobile device.

Mobility could also be about allowing the users to approve those invoices when they have pockets of time. They have access to SAP Concur solutions in between meetings or as they're walking to their car; they have visibility to that invoice that's waiting for approval. Providing mobility to those end users helps speed up the approval process of those invoices.

Over the past couple of years, institutions have begun to recognize that they've been tethered to their physical workspace. Mobility with SAP Concur solutions un-tethers that process and allows operations to continue regardless of where the person sits.

## Some may see the automation of all AP functions as a daunting task. What are some small and simple ways to get started? Where is the low-hanging fruit?

**JC:** We know that higher ed has burnout from long IT projects delivering or not delivering the value that they were expected. When you look to automate the AP function with SAP Concur solutions, we measure these projects in weeks and months rather than years. You can essentially

SAP CONCUR  
MOBILITY  
SOLUTIONS SPEED  
UP APPROVAL  
PROCESSES

digitize 100% of your invoices in a single easy-to-use platform in just weeks or a couple of months.

Once you start to get all of the invoices into the system, then you can take your payment and invoice processing to the next level by negotiating prompt payment discounts and rebate points. SAP Concur solutions also has several best-in-class payment partners that can help extend this digital framework into the payment space on behalf of your institution.

**TD:** For some schools, it may be looking at automating that full process from check request to purchase order, leveraging SAP Concur solutions to intelligently lift the data off of the invoice and match that in an automated way to the invoice.

For others it may be more of a crawl, walk, run approach. Let's start off with removing all of the check requests that we have. Now let's bring our non-PO spend into the system, and then move later to bringing in the PO process or integrating. SAP Concur solutions have the ability to come into an institution where they're at and to provide for that future growth.

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