

# Case study: Northern Michigan University

## Northern Has Confidence in Addresses Entered Through Its Self-Service Portal



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**“We can now confidently encourage students to enter their own data because we are ensuring that only quality data is accepted. We also know that students will have a good experience on our site.”**

**Brian Larson,  
Northern Michigan University**

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### Situation

Northern Michigan University deployed self-service technology in the form of *My NMU* to put campus administrative tasks, including address changes and updates, directly in the hands of students. However, with no gatekeeper to filter out bad address data before it was submitted, the integrity of the school's database was compromised.

Northern has a policy of having at least one accurate address per enrolled student. After rolling out self-service it became evident that this requirement was not being met. Northern sought a way to keep self-service technology available to students while guaranteeing the data submitted through it was accurate.

### Solution

Northern adopted QAS Pro Web to verify the address information entered over the web. By using sample code and best practices provided by Experian QAS, senior programmer/analyst Brian Larson was able to have address verification up and running in about a day. Experian QAS verifies addresses in real-time before they are passed on to the database.

When an incomplete address is detected by the product, QAS Pro Web interactively works with the engaged user to prompt for neglected address elements such as apartment numbers and street directionals – address components that, though critical to deliverability, are often neglected when students input their own information.

### Results

With QAS Pro Web, Northern has confidence that the address data entered by students is complete and usable by all campus departments. Before a student user submits an address online it is validated in real-time against official postal files. If the address is incomplete the student is prompted to augment the address before navigating away, so Northern has reduced the resources spent on manually researching undeliverable addresses.

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### Address Verification for Student Self-Service

Northern Michigan University, located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, was established in 1899. With 9,700 undergraduate and graduate students, it is one of the thirteen public universities in Michigan. As a "laptop university" Northern guarantees that technology is at the fingertips of every student.

Like many progressive higher education institutions, Northern deployed the SunGard™ Banner Student self-service module in the form of *My NMU* to make pertinent information readily available to students while reducing the administrative cycles typically necessary to maintain records. Among other things, Northern's online portal facilitates financial aid, class registration and address changes.

*My NMU* reduces the amount of data entry previously required by individual departments. However, the self-service technology removed the intuition of a human filter, impacting the quality and deliverability of addresses entered into the school's database. At Northern, students flooded the university database with incomplete address information. Biographical records were missing apartment numbers and zip codes, and were wrought with formatting errors.

The ramification of this bad data was evident when various campus departments tried to use it. For example, campus parking permits were incorrectly routed and parent care package solicitations weren't received. Although back-end scrubbing was identifying the errors, the student was long-gone to correct them. Northern sought a solution that would ensure optimal data quality while maintaining the benefits of portal technology.

Even further, as the custodians of future alumni records, undergraduate decision makers at Northern realized they were potentially passing incorrect premise information to the annual fund. With today's students moving multiple times in the years after they finish their undergraduate degrees, it is crucial that institutions collect accurate address information from them while they can in order to track them through their many moves.

"The problem with students entering their own information is that address data is questionable," said Larson. "We wanted to get address errors to be corrected before students navigated away from the site."

### With QAS Pro Web Students Validate Their Own Data

Northern was already using Experian QAS on campus in departments such as admissions and alumni. In those offices QAS Pro works with Banner to facilitate staff address entry and guarantee that all address updates and changes are accurate. QAS Pro also formats address to a department's specific standards, allowing each department to tailor the look of their outgoing communications.

Northern saw verification of student-entered information as the next step in a complete address integrity strategy, so Larson moved forward with QAS Pro Web service to verify the addresses accepted through the school's student portal. Experian QAS provided sample code in a variety of different languages, including Northern's preferred coding language PHP. Larson used this out-of-the-box code to interface Experian QAS with the school's self-service application.

Larson decided to customize the address verification pages to maintain the look and feel of *My NMU*. When students are prompted to add missing address information the Northern experience is preserved with the continuation of the standard *My NMU* header – address verification is an extension of the portal. Even with that level of customization he was able to push address verification live in about a day.

"Self-service with QAS increases our operational efficiencies and moves us closer to a campus-wide technology solution," said Larson. "Giving students the power to use self-service to its full potential is very important – it helps us work better for them."

### Confidence in Data Quality

Rolling out an online portal does not have to compromise the integrity of a school's database. By validating addresses interactively at the point-of-entry a school can eliminate the need for manually researching, reformatting and updating incomplete addresses.

"There is no reason to dedicate staff resources to address verification if students can do it themselves," said Larson. "It is more costly to go back and research bad addresses after the fact – with QAS we simply prompt students for accurate information up front."

In summary, address verification from Experian QAS protects the investment Northern Michigan University made in self-service technology. The university now has confidence in the quality of address information entered by students online consequently reducing the time spent correcting addresses on the back end. The addition of QAS Pro Web to the Banner Web portal resulted in no downtime, requires minimal ongoing maintenance and sustains the look and feel of the university branded portal, all while preventing bad addresses from being entered.

Address verification impacts the bottom line by reducing the costs associated with postage and printing, but more importantly ensures that the school has a deliverable student database. As students matriculate and become alumni, the quality of the school's database will impact the success of fundraising drives and the strength of the alumni community.

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