



## New medical school enjoys strong, fast start with open source, self-service Business Intelligence.

**The Commonwealth Medical College (TCMC)**, a new medical school serving all of northeastern Pennsylvania, accepted its first class of MD and MBS students in Fall, 2009. One of its key missions is to address a shortage of doctors in this region of Pennsylvania, by training new practitioners locally—in the expectation that many will choose to remain in the area after becoming qualified physicians. The College operates a main campus in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and campuses in Wilkes-Barre and Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

### The need for self-service information.

As the first entering class and an enthusiastic faculty began the university's first term, the need for easy access to the school's administrative data became quickly apparent. As with most higher education institutions, TCMC needed to manage a broad range of functions: finance and budget, faculty development, human resources, student information and activities, admissions, fundraising and more.

To that end, the school's lean IT department put a number of key systems in place. Most of these are licensed software solutions that could be configured to support the university's activities, but are designed and tuned for transaction processing. Typically, access to the information in these applications was difficult for end users.

*"Many of the systems we had in place—notably the finance system—gave end users only a limited look at the data. Reporting and querying was limited and rigid, and we began getting requests for additional reports,"* explains John Kearney, TCMC Director of Administrative Systems.

While a student information database did provide some limited access, other applications, including those designed to manage Admissions and Faculty Development functions, offered no means to look at raw data. "If someone needed, say, a list of students, addresses and contact information, they'd have to request a report from IT resources, who would assemble SQL queries and export data into Excel spreadsheets," says Kearney.

Given limited IT resources—not surprising at an organization in startup mode—the team began looking for ways to create self-service access to their growing pool of databases and applications. “One month we met and decided to pursue a data mart solution,” says Kearney. “And in a matter of weeks we were evaluating Business Intelligence solutions.”

The rapidity of this move, initiated despite already busy schedules, hinted at the surprising speed with which TCMC would develop and expand its BI initiative.

## Choosing a Business Intelligence solution

Kearney and his team quickly narrowed their BI platform choices to three, which included SAP Business Objects, Jaspersoft and one other. “Each of our finalist platforms had strengths, and we felt that any of them would meet our information access needs,” says Kearney.

But cost was an important factor—and Jaspersoft’s per-server licensing model and significantly lower made it dramatically more affordable than the other solutions. “It’s not unusual for an end-user of one of the source systems to need reporting or query access only for a limited time. If we had to license each user this way, it would add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars—and that’s just not in our budget,” Kearney explains.

The team chose Jaspersoft—and rolled up its collective sleeves. Less than eight weeks later, JasperReports Server was up and running, and the team had deployed an array of finance-oriented data collections, ready for ad hoc query access by business users. Shortly thereafter, additional data collections, focused on admissions, financial aid, registrar, and faculty development, went online.

*“The point was to very quickly give people access to the data they needed—and the most expedient way to achieve that was providing these data domains and the Jaspersoft ad hoc query tool.”* The drag-and-drop design of that tool minimized the need for extensive training and quickly enabled business user self-service.

## Project details/highlights

TCMC’s data mart technology stack includes the MySQL database, Apache web server, and PHP scripting, hosted on a Windows server (migration to a Linux server is in the works), reflecting the team’s preference for the low cost and high flexibility of open source.

## CASE STUDY

The data mart includes information from most of the operational systems in use at the school, with the exception of Development (fundraising) and Grants Management data—“which are both in the queue,” says Kearney. The data are pulled in from the source systems on a varied schedule, using simple copies and moves. “We look forward to implementing more formal—and incremental—ETL functionality in the future,” Kearney reports.

Immediately upon launching the ad hoc query facilities, the IT team went to work creating pre-formatted, parameter-driven reports using Jaspersoft’s graphical iReport definition tool. “We worked on those for about two months,” says Kearney. “But we went much farther than we expected. We were able to completely replace a cumbersome budget reporting system, which had involved complex spreadsheets distributed to dozens of users. Now we have eight powerful reports that use table-level security to ensure each manager sees just what they need to see.”

Users can drill down several levels from budget category summaries, enabling them to easily track project spending. This system of reports and security also efficiently manages the university’s need to do fund-based accounting, which adds its own complexities.

In addition to the extensive pre-formatted and ad hoc report solutions, the team is also developing dashboards. One example: a “Dean’s Dashboard” designed to give executives an at-a-glance handle on admissions—tracked by degree program—as well as key monthly and year-to-date financials.

All of this was in place just six months after the Jaspersoft implementation. More than 70 business users access these solutions regularly, with more on the way. And it was all accomplished by a very small team.

### Benefits of the Jaspersoft-powered data mart.

*“We built quite a Business Intelligence solution in a short time, thanks to our team and to our end users, who have been enthusiastic,”* says Kearney. He cites older, larger institutions that still don’t use BI. *“For us to have this in place at this early stage is a tremendous advantage—and the user community is already seeing that.”*

TCMC’s rapid BI rollout hasn’t gone unnoticed outside the school. At Jaspersoft’s recent annual user conference, Kearney and his team received the Jaspersoft BI Rock Star award—a nod reserved for truly impressive BI feats.

Kearney remains positive about the future as well, pointing to the anticipated rollout of dashboards, and the increased ability to create cross-functional reports without taxing the source systems. *“We also look forward to building in analytics—in-memory and traditional online analytic processing (OLAP). And we see that as an incremental step—not a monumental project—because we’re putting the foundation in place now.”*

The user community is enthused as well. “I get copied on emails between department heads, and see them sharing reporting and query ideas, without my involvement,” says Kearney—and, with a smile: *“It’s pretty gratifying to see them getting value from this technology. Yes, they’re geniuses in their fields—but we’re helping them become self-service IT analysts, too.”*

## About Jaspersoft

Jaspersoft provides the most flexible, cost effective and widely deployed Business Intelligence suite in the world, enabling better decision making through highly interactive, web-based reports, dashboards and analysis. Leveraging a commercial open source business model, Jaspersoft provides end-to-end BI capabilities at a fraction of the cost of other vendors. The BI suite includes pixel-perfect enterprise reporting, ad hoc query, dashboards, OLAP and in-memory analysis, and data integration. Jaspersoft is the only BI vendor that enables companies to adapt to the new, virtualized world by providing a complete spectrum of on-premise, multi-tenant SaaS and cloud-based deployment options for both embedded and standalone business intelligence. Unlike traditional BI vendors, Jaspersoft is built on a modern, lightweight, standards-based architecture and offers greater vendor independence thanks to its open source codebase. Unlike niche BI vendors, Jaspersoft represents a safe choice with tens of thousands of production deployments across a wide range of industries.

Jaspersoft’s open source business intelligence software has more than 13 million product downloads worldwide, 160,000 production deployments and over 14,000 commercial customers in 100 countries. Its BI suite is advanced regularly by a development community of more than 200,000 registered members.

For more information visit: <http://www.jaspersoft.com> and <http://www.jasperforge.org>.

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