Fueling accurate academic reporting

Read about how Rice University created a structured, trusted database of their faculty activities, drawing from campus systems and the Interfolio Data Service.

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Shakeups in institutional technology can leave faculty and staff scrambling—especially when a long-running system is on its last legs. Rice University was faced with a university-wide migration of general HR systems as well as a homegrown system for activity reporting that was dying and needed to be replaced, leaving major gaps in capabilities to manage important faculty affairs processes.

Rice decided to implement the full Interfolio Faculty Information System to bridge these gaps, giving the university a singular solution to manage faculty hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, and reviews and promotions. "Before we started using Interfolio, we used different tools for different purposes," shared Celeste Boudreaux, former Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Affairs. "It was important for us to have a tool that covered as many different parts of the faculty lifecycle in one company as possible."

Themes discussed:

- Greater Transparency in Less Time
- Using Interfolio to Handle 80% of the Data Legwork
- Faculty Buy-in Fuels Successful Implementations

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Greater Transparency in Less Time

After Rice administration announced an upcoming transition to a one-size-fits-all HRIS, Boudreaux and her team recognized the need for a new solution to support the nuances of faculty hiring at the university. Thus, the first priority for her team was implementing Interfolio Faculty Search. The institution followed with Interfolio Review, Promotion & Tenure as well as Interfolio Faculty Activity Reporting (FAR), which helped resolve the issue of the old homegrown system that needed to be replaced. Rice is also in the process of implementing Interfolio Lifecycle Management, filling voids in the new HR system for tracking certain kinds of faculty milestones.

Prior to Interfolio, the promotion and tenure process at Rice was very much manual—with the exception of digitizing papers into PDFs, which would then be uploaded to an online file-sharing tool. "That was a big win for us to be able to make that process more automated and have a workflow where everybody could have visibility," noted Boudreaux. Interfolio helps bring greater transparency to the process, which is incredibly beneficial if an appeal arises. It also helps save time, as questions or issues that used to require lengthy research to respond to can now be answered quickly by checking the case in Interfolio. "It's important to have a process that is documented," said Boudreaux, "and that everybody can look back and see what happened."

Using Interfolio to Handle 80% of the Data Legwork

In order to save faculty and staff time on data input for accurate activity reporting, Rice also uses Interfolio Data Service—a powerful capability that fuels Interfolio Faculty Activity Reporting. "By bringing in data from our other campus systems, that takes care of about 40% of what we need to be populated in FAR," shared Boudreaux. "With the Interfolio Data Service, that brings in about another 40% of the publications part. So that only leaves 20% that has to be manually entered by someone." The Interfolio Data Service seeks out and pulls in data tied to the institution's faculty from a pool of over 250 million publications from over 260,000 journals and other reliable sources, giving faculty the opportunity to verify the data and, if accurate, add the items to their record. "It brings in the authoritative, complete, accurate data into a structured record," added Boudreaux. "It makes it very searchable, and it lets Interfolio be able to display it according to the faculty member's choice in all these different citation styles. We're really excited about that functionality."

"The faculty definitely benefit from using Interfolio at Rice," she noted. "It saves them time on administrative tasks so that they can focus on what's really important: their research, their teaching, their service." Boudreaux shared that Interfolio also helps administrators such as herself make decisions that are evidence-based and not anecdote-based, thanks to the availability of more consistent centralized data. "It's helpful all the way up from the department staff—whose time is also being used more productively—to the faculty, to the senior administrators," she said. "It's helping everybody."

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Faculty Buy-in Fuels Successful Implementations

Several years prior to implementing Interfolio, Rice had attempted to roll out another system for faculty activity reporting. Unfortunately, the technology proved to be difficult for faculty to use, resulting in complaints that eventually led to the system being removed after just a few months. "I know what an implementation can look like if it's not the right product," said Boudreaux. "You can check all the checkboxes, but if the faculty don't like it and won't use it, it won't succeed."

Boudreaux noted how intuitive Interfolio has been for faculty, who are able to easily navigate the system and do what they need to do. "What we have learned is that a big value of Interfolio is that it is made with the faculty primarily in mind. It is very user-friendly," she noted. This ease of use helps streamline processes for faculty, ensuring they can spend less time on things like manual data entry for reports or gathering details from various sources for their promotion and tenure cases. "Anything that you have to train the whole faculty body on how to use is a high-stakes endeavor," she said. "The less we heard from the faculty, the more we knew we were on the right track."

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Trusted by more than 500 universities across 20 countries, Interfolio's innovative Faculty Information System enables academic leaders to achieve strategic success and drive institutional impact.

The most comprehensive platform of its kind, the Interfolio Faculty Information System streamlines processes for faculty hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, and reviews and promotions.

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