THE OBJECTIVE

Northern Arizona University (NAU) opened their doors in 1899 with only 23 students and one professor. Today, they have more than 30 locations and 25,000 students enrolled at their Flagstaff campus alone. As the university has grown, its technology requirements have also increased, particularly in recent years.

When it was time to renew their Oracle system, the university determined that scale, speed and stability were vital to the new system. They also wanted better visibility into the database to facilitate tasks such as performance tuning, easier directory-level changes and more reliable multi-master replication. They evaluated directory servers from several vendors, including Ping. But the Ping Identity Platform delivered ten times faster performance than the DSEE server and met the requirements the team was looking for, not to mention the quality and speed of support. The choice was a no-brainer.

THE CHALLENGE

- An aging Oracle DSEE server was unable to keep up with increasing demands.
- The IT department was managing up to 180,000 identities across a wide range of critical day-to-day functions, from email account access and grading systems to support for departmental websites.
- Years of industry acquisitions made the legacy directory harder to use, configure and optimize.
- Support was being phased out at the end of 2014, and the system had periodic issues with stability and performance.
- The university didn’t see much by way of innovation, and the product wasn’t evolving to meet needs.

SOLUTION AT-A-GLANCE

1. Centralized infrastructure.
2. Automated IAM services, including real-time repository for email addresses, repository for DNS and DHCP hosts and users, federated SSO and metadirectory-based change log.
3. BIO/DEMO repository for 27,000 students, 5,000 faculty and staff, and 120,000 others.
4. Highly customized schema with 500 attributes.
THE SOLUTION

The Ping Identity Platform now serves as the central directory server for both external (alumni and affiliates) and internal users (students, faculty and staff). Starting with an easier migration process, the LDAP server delivered capabilities above and beyond other products. The team is notified of any data errors, so they can make corrections and updates, and migrate a clean dataset that’s compliant with regulations, helping to avoid the challenges of low data integrity.

The system also includes advanced administrative dashboards that give the team detailed insight into system operations, helping them make better decisions to improve performance and efficiently use resources. Simple, yet comprehensive scripting capabilities allow them to automate self-tuning and audit logging of all admin commands. They can also automate advanced command line (CLI) and interactive menu-driven interfaces. This efficiency allows many tasks to be accomplished in hours instead of days or weeks.

Improved stability and performance enables the team to confidently utilize advanced features they were reluctant to implement on the aging DSEE system. They can better support users with features such as persistent search that allows real-time access to data.

“The time the Ping Identity Platform saves us means we’re now able to focus on other initiatives. We can better audit our identity data and maximize connection security.”
- Summer Steddom, Middleware and IAM Technical Lead

THE RESULTS

10X faster performance for identity management processing

Users can immediately find the information they need even with traffic volumes averaging as high as 7 million searches daily.

50% reduction in replication instances

Multi-master replication cuts the number of required instances in half without sacrificing availability for real-time application needs.

50% reduction in memory usage

Decreased from 24 GB RAM to 12 GB RAM, providing capacity for future growth and additional applications.

1 day to create and deploy a plug-in

Substantially less time than the days or weeks that were required when using the Oracle server.