

Maximizing the capabilities of Google Workspace for Education at Virginia Commonwealth University



Statement

The education industry is making strides towards providing its stakeholders with uninterrupted access to technology that will enhance productivity, communication, and collaboration. With more faculty and students using digital tools in the classroom, colleges and universities across the country are seeking ways to transform the modern teaching and learning environment with data analytics, flexible course models, and open educational resources, which all begin with a solid online learning platform. Google Workspace for Education provides institutions with an intuitive, reliable, and secure digital space to work in. Its comprehensive suite of tools helps enrich critical and creative thinking, streamline complex workflows, and proactively protects sensitive data from cybersecurity threats. That is why so many higher education institutions are migrating to it and configuring it to meet the unique needs of their community.

The migration: Collaborating on a single domain

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is a public research institution in Richmond, Virginia that serves nearly 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students. When considering edtech trends and adoption cycles, VCU has demonstrated itself to be a technologically savvy institution.

Previously, the institution was operating on IBM's Lotus Notes. Google launched Google Workspace in 2006, and, for its robust inventory of apps and features, VCU moved their students to a Google Workspace domain in 2009. By 2012, their entire population of faculty and staff moved to a different Google Workspace domain. At the time, there were a lot of concerns about having faculty and students in the same domain. Some settings in the Google Admin console were global, not OU specific. It was EDU best practice to have separate domains to make the management of those configurations easier. "That's just how it was done at that time," shared Amanda Carlson, the Deputy Director of Collaboration Services. "It was mainly due to costs related to ediscovery. We didn't need to run ediscovery for our students so we operated in two separate Google domains."

VCU found great success in switching to Google Workspace for Education as it further modernized the way their users create, share, search, and store data. As they progressed in their Google journey and as changes were made within the cloud-based ecosystem, VCU's technical team discovered that having two domains made it difficult for their stakeholders to seamlessly communicate and collaborate with each other. The Director of Collaboration Services, Connie Whetstine explained, "From supporting the two domains, we were always asked 'how do I share things with the other domain?' Or 'Which domain do I use? I'm a faculty member AND a student' or 'I'm a student AND a staff member.'" This was a challenge for a number of institutions and eventually the best practice changed from having multiple domains to having one. A single domain allows for stronger security measures and greater collaboration opportunities. Google had referred VCU to Amplified IT in the past for product support and in spring of 2021, VCU returned to Amplified IT as a trusted Google for Education Premier Partner to initiate a Migration project to unify their users on a single domain.

In Google to Google migrations nothing needs to be converted between platforms. However, the process can be complex due to Drive in particular because, unlike when migrating from Office 365 to Google for example, the same domain cannot exist in both the source and destination at the same time. These moving parts can present challenges and lead inexperienced staff into traps that are difficult to get out of. To help VCU avoid those obstacles, our technical consultants provided them with a white-glove migration and handled every aspect of transferring their emails, calendar, contacts, and files.

After the completion of the migration, those recurring questions disappeared. "I think our faculty is realizing that it's so much easier to work with students in the same domain. It's just, it's so much better," Connie added.



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- **Connie Whetstine**, Director of Collaboration Services,
Virginia Commonwealth University

The Audit: Evaluating domain effectiveness and efficiency

Once the migration was complete and after witnessing the increased value of having their stakeholders "live" together in one domain, VCU wanted to evaluate their usage of Google Workspace. Amanda said, "We're well into our Google Journey, but once we merged our domains we wanted to make sure we were maximizing Google Workspace's capability for our faculty, staff, and students. We want them to utilize what's available to them." They decided to engage with Amplified IT again and requested a Google for Education Audit. The Audit revealed that VCU already had many settings configured to EDU best practices but it also recommended changes they needed to implement so they could take full advantage of the power their domain offered for security and risk mitigation. The Audit dove deep into the Admin console and analyzed the configurations of the OU structure, Vault retention rules, sharing settings, controlling Marketplace and more. As Amplified IT consultants guided them through the Audit results, they shared best practices for Higher Education with VCU. Each institution's domain is uniquely set to serve their stakeholders and the consultants were able to have a conversation on why their settings were configured the way they were to meet their strategic goals. "So far, we've turned on a few security features and are conducting some segment tests to see how they work for our environment," Connie iterated.

VCU's technical team members are confident that the insight they gained from the Audit will equip them to provide an even safer domain for their stakeholders and expand the adoption even further.

Google Workspace for Education provides institutions with a cloud-based solution that sustains their desire for growth and to facilitate a positive digital working, teaching, and learning experience. Not only can Amplified IT support colleges and universities through the migration from platform to platform or domain to domain, but our experts can also help them discover how to optimize how they use Google Workspace tools and features. Virginia Commonwealth University is now seeking to refine data retention strategies and are looking to implement available security features.