



UNC-GREENSBORO TRANSFORMS I-20 FROM BOTTLENECK TO BREAKTHROUGH WITH TERRA DOTTA



Summary

NAME:

University of North
Carolina at
Greensboro

LOCATION:

Greensboro, NC

OF INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS:

- 18,000+ total students
- 700+ international students from 90+ countries

At UNC Greensboro (UNCG), global engagement is part of the institution's identity. Through more than 100 study abroad exchange programs, globally focused academics, and a thriving international student population of more than 700 students from over 90 countries, UNCG is committed to developing globally minded graduates prepared to lead.

Recognized for seven consecutive years as North Carolina's top university for social mobility, UNCG is also dedicated to improving the socioeconomic status of students and their families. The institution is also acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Education for excelling in access and success with Pell-eligible students.

Yet even with this strong commitment to student success, UNCG's international student services team faced a challenge familiar to many institutions: an I-20 processing workflow that couldn't keep pace with growing demand while maintaining the accuracy and compliance standards students depend on.

When delays started affecting student experience and operational visibility became limited, the team knew it was time for a fundamental change, not just in technology, but in how work flowed across people, processes, and systems.

Near-real-time

I-20 readiness once documents are submitted

Increased

audit readiness and process transparency

Improved

operational visibility via built-in reporting & analytics



When compliance-driven workflows create hidden friction

Before adopting Terra Dotta's ISSS solution I-20 processing relied on multiple disconnected systems, spreadsheet tracking, and manual document handling. On the surface, delays appeared to be technical. In reality, the root causes were embedded in the workflow itself.

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“Many of the delays weren't caused by system lag,” explains Adwoa Arhin, Business Analyst at UNC Greensboro, who led the transformation effort. “They were caused by hidden process dependencies—steps that were unintentionally tied together.”

For example, profile creation was dependent on student intent confirmation and downstream synchronization timing. If one step paused, the entire workflow stalled. Staff relied heavily on spreadsheets to track financial documents and status updates, which introduced duplication, rework, and reduced visibility. The result: unnecessary lag, increased handling steps, and limited real-time oversight. For a growing international program, that model wasn't sustainable.

Opportunities

10+

study abroad exchange programs

150+

undergraduate degree programs

200+

master's, doctoral, and graduate certificate programs

Rethinking the workflow with simplicity in mind

The Terra Dotta implementation did more than introduce new technology; it created space for UNCG's team to step back and simplify their work. The platform made it easier to streamline steps, remove unnecessary handoffs, and build a process that supports both speed and compliance.

As part of the implementation, the UNCG team gained a clearer view of where processes could move independently, allowing I-20 preparation to progress without waiting on student-triggered actions. Financial document collection was also brought directly into Terra Dotta, eliminating the need for re-uploads and manual tracking.

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“Direct intake improved both speed and accuracy,” Arhin adds. “It allowed staff to focus on review and decision-making instead of managing documents across systems.”

By using standardized statuses, bulk profile creation, and built-in workflows, the ISSS team reduced manual effort and increased transparency throughout the process. The result was a simpler, more intuitive way of working—one that supports staff efficiency without adding complexity or staffing demands.

From reactive tracking to proactive oversight

One of the most significant shifts came with Terra Dotta’s built-in reporting and analytics.

“Replacing spreadsheet-based tracking with Terra Dotta ISSS reporting shifted the team from reactive follow-up to proactive oversight,” says Arhin. “Real-time visibility improved workload planning, issue identification, and audit readiness.”

Instead of piecing together updates from multiple sources, staff could view live data on admitted students, processing status, and completed I-20s in one place. This clarity allowed the team to identify bottlenecks earlier, distribute workload more effectively, and support compliance requirements with greater confidence.

Rather than responding to urgent requests, the office could anticipate needs. During peak periods, the workflow remained steady without adding headcount.



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A scalable foundation for the future

The transformation delivered both immediate wins and long-term operational resilience. UNC Greensboro now achieves near-real-time I-20 readiness once documents are submitted, a dramatic shift from the delays that previously frustrated students and staff alike. Manual document re-uploads and spreadsheet tracking have been eliminated entirely.

Graduate assistants spend significantly less time on repetitive handling tasks, freeing them to contribute to more meaningful work. Built-in reporting and analytics have enhanced operational visibility across the board, while process transparency and audit readiness have strengthened considerably.

Most importantly, the team created a scalable, resilient workflow that can adapt to changing needs without requiring constant intervention or additional staffing. And by aligning people, processes, and technology, UNCG transformed I-20 processing from a bottleneck into a strategic strength, creating a smoother, more confident start for every international student they serve.

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About the author

Adwoa Arhin is a Business Analyst with Global Engagement Office at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she leads process redesign and system implementation work supporting international student services. She previously worked as a Business Analyst with Vodafone Ghana, supporting telecom initiatives and customer-focused process improvements.

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