Client story

California State University, Sacramento

Building digital equity through cloud-powered virtual learning labs

Client overview

- Part of the California State University system
- Serves a diverse student population across dozens of academic programs
- Prioritizes equitable access to technology and learning resources for all students

Objectives

- Extend secure, reliable access to courses and specialized software through virtual desktops
- Accelerate inclusive online education to enable equitable access for all learners
- Deploy an expanded virtual desktop lab for students within an aggressive timeline
- Establish a scalable, sustainable digital learning model

Why Unisys?

- End-to-end delivery expertise, from strategy and design through implementation and managed services
- Proven experience delivering anywhere, any-device learning environments
- Compliance-ready, resilient solutions aligned to NIST and ISO standards that protect institutional data and student trust

Solution

Cloud-native virtual desktop transformation

Designed and implemented a secure, scalable Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD) environment, including:

- Remote desktops and apps, including GPU-accelerated options
- End-to-end automation with infrastructure-as-code
- Azure Landing Zone with policy-based guardrails aligned to NIST and ISO standards
- Fully managed operations covering FinOps, SecOps and CloudOps

Collaboration proved essential to success. The Unisys team worked closely with Sacramento State stakeholders to understand unique institutional needs, student demographics and operational constraints. This approach accelerated implementation, allowing the university to meet its aggressive deadline while implementing a solution aligned with its long-term strategic goals.

Zero downtime
for a smooth, cost-controlled transition

100%
removal of hardware barriers

31,000+
students with course access from any device, anywhere

Results and benefits

- Enabled access to specialized software from any device, eliminating location constraints and hardware barriers
- Improved spending by shifting from capital expenditures to predictable operating expenses
- Strengthened compliance with policy-based guardrails aligned to NIST and ISO standards
- Enhanced flexibility, business continuity and ability to adapt to changing educational needs
- Reduced physical infrastructure requirements, freeing lab space for collaborative learning environments

Equalizing student access through cloud-powered virtual labs

Sacramento State, part of the California State University system, serves a diverse student population with varying needs, schedules and circumstances. Many students balance coursework with work and family responsibilities, while others face long commutes or lack access to high-spec computers required for specialized software. These realities created an opportunity to rethink how the university delivers technology-enabled learning.

Leadership recognized that virtual desktops could unlock new ways to give every student flexible, meaningful access to their courses. Sacramento State sought a scalable, sustainable digital learning model founded on strategic technology choices and robust partnerships that would support students for years to come.

Meeting an aggressive deadline

Sacramento State had a six-month timeframe to expand its virtual desktop environment to significantly:

- Implement a virtual student lab environment that would enable computing access anytime and anywhere
- Remove location constraints and reduce hardware barriers
- Accelerate inclusive online education for all learners

With a tight timeline and complex requirements, leadership sought a partner with deep cloud expertise and a shared commitment to helping students adopt new tools to succeed.

Why Sacramento State chose Unisys

Sacramento State chose Unisys for our comprehensive delivery, proven results in virtual learning environments, and a strong focus on security and trust. First, Unisys offered end-to-end delivery expertise, managing everything from strategy and design through implementation and managed services. Second, the company brought proven experience in delivering virtual learning environments that work reliably on various types of devices and in multiple locations. And finally, Unisys demonstrated a security-focused approach built on compliance-ready architectures aligned with NIST and ISO standards, which are essential for protecting student data and maintaining institutional trust.

Implementing a cloud-native virtual desktop solution

Unisys partnered with Sacramento State to design and deploy a secure, scalable Azure Virtual Desktop environment, delivering a smooth, cost-controlled transition that reduced risk and strengthened the university's security posture.

The solution centered on cloud-native AVD student labs, offering flexible, scalable desktops. This also included GPU-accelerated options for graphics-intensive coursework across disciplines from engineering to digital arts. Unisys implemented end-to-end automation with infrastructure-as-code (automated deployment templates), enabling rapid provisioning, consistent desktop image management and repeatable updates that would serve the university's evolving needs.

An Azure Landing Zone provides policy-based controls aligned with NIST and ISO standards, supporting governance and compliance from day one. Fully managed operations covering FinOps, SecOps, and CloudOps optimize spending, enhance security and promote ongoing reliability without burdening internal technology teams.

The AVD-powered student labs deliver virtual desktops and remote apps, giving students a secure way to work from almost anywhere. Students can now access specialized software for their majors from personal devices, eliminating the need for expensive, high-specification workstations.

Partnership and collaboration, from design to change management

Collaboration proved essential to success. The Unisys team worked closely with Sacramento State stakeholders to understand unique institutional needs, student demographics and operational constraints. This collaborative approach accelerated implementation, helped the university to meet its aggressive deadline and set a strong foundation for long-term strategic digital learning goals.

Unisys effectively managed change throughout deployment, providing clear communication and building buy-in across campus departments. The team addressed technical challenges proactively, helping create a smooth transition that minimized disruption to students and faculty.

Upgrading the student experience

The AVD-based student labs broadened access to coursework and specialized software for all learners. They eliminated location constraints, improved security, and enabled long-term laptop checkout programs, software purchases for all majors, flexible teaching modalities and broadband access.
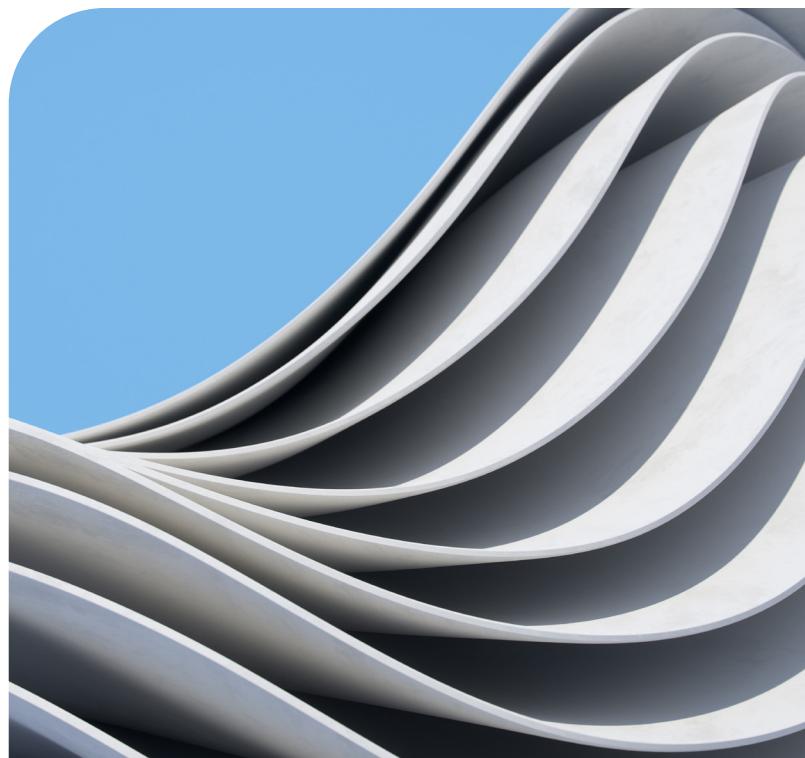
Students who once struggled to access specialized software due to hardware limitations, long commutes or busy schedules can now participate fully in their courses. This transformation particularly benefits students balancing work and family responsibilities, those with long commutes, and learners requiring flexible schedules.

Delivering value across campus and beyond

In addition to improving the student experience, Sacramento State realized significant operational benefits. The university reduced endpoint requirements, eliminating the need to purchase high-spec workstations for student use. Financial planning improved as the university transitioned from large capital purchases to predictable operating expenses, providing leaders with clearer control over long-term budgeting.

The smaller physical lab footprint also freed valuable campus space for collaborative, active learning areas that encourage student engagement and peer interaction.

With a cloud-first environment that can scale with demand, Sacramento State has enhanced its ability to adapt quickly, remain flexible, and maintain continuity across various learning models. The university can respond rapidly to enrollment changes, new program demands and emerging technologies without significant infrastructure investments.

Poised for growth with online and hybrid capabilities

Sacramento State now offers an inclusive, secure digital learning environment that expands online and hybrid possibilities, setting a foundation for sustainable growth.

The university's success demonstrates how colleges can utilize cloud technology to advance equity, expand access, and enhance every student's learning experience. As the university continues to expand its virtual lab offerings and student services, the scalable AVD infrastructure provides the flexibility and performance needed to meet evolving educational demands.

Take the next step

To explore how Unisys Azure Virtual Desktop solutions can help you build digital equity and transform virtual learning at your institution, visit us online at unisys.com or contact us today.

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