

Catalina's Feedback: Banner Automation for Financial Aid Professionals

As I tested the Banner Automation for Financial Aid Professionals course, I was impressed by its design and practical focus for staff learning Banner automation tools. Overall, the course demonstrates a clear commitment to empowering financial aid professionals, but there are areas where additional depth and learner-centered enhancements could increase its effectiveness and impact.

What Worked Well

The course begins with a strong Start Here – Course Overview section. The “Welcome to Banner Automation for Financial Aid Professionals” module immediately orients learners to the purpose of the course, while the “Course Overview & Goals” clearly outlines expectations. These pieces create transparency, especially for staff who may feel apprehensive about adopting new technologies.

I appreciated the “Introduce Yourself – Automation Reflection” activity, which builds a sense of learning community and prompts staff to situate themselves in the content. This reflection is vital because many staff have different levels of familiarity with Banner, and sharing these experiences creates a connection across roles.

Module 1: Introduction to Banner Automation is well-structured with a logical sequence. The “Learning Objectives” are clear, and the inclusion of a “Video Lecture: Why Automate?” sets the tone before diving into technical skills. The quiz and reflection journal at the end of Module 1 provide a well-balanced approach to formative assessment and reflective practice, catering to both knowledge recall and critical thinking.

In Module 2: Exploring Banner Automation Tools, the “Banner Process Automation Tools Guide” and the “Video Lecture: Banner Automation Tools” are practical and job-embedded. The “Automation Tools Scenario Example” bridges theory with application, demonstrating how these tools would operate in real workflows. I especially liked the “Discussion – Excited to Implement!” prompt because it encourages individuals to project forward, thinking about how these tools can resolve inefficiencies in their departments.

Finally, the Student Lounge Q&A Discussion Board is a thoughtful addition to build community, answer questions in real-time, and create a supportive space for staff learning.

What Didn't Work Well

One limitation is the lack of interactive components within modules. While there are videos and readings, there are no interactive simulations or drag-and-drop activities that allow learners to actively engage with concepts before applying them in Banner. Without these interactive elements, learning risks becoming too passive.

Additionally, I noticed no explicit accessibility features mentioned in the modules, such as alternative text for visuals, downloadable transcripts for videos, or options for audio-only learning. Financial aid offices are diverse, and accessibility considerations are essential to ensure equity for all staff.

Another challenge is that the quizzes appear to be limited in scope, primarily focusing on knowledge recall rather than application or troubleshooting. For instance, asking staff to identify potential errors in automation setup or choose the best automation tool for a specific process would strengthen their decision-making skills.

Finally, while the “Reflection Journals” are valuable, they seem isolated from any collaborative sharing component. Reflection is most powerful when staff can read and comment on each other’s insights to build deeper learning and departmental alignment.

Recommendations for Improvement

Incorporate interactive elements, such as Banner simulation walkthroughs, where learners can practice steps in a sandbox environment before implementing in live systems. This would significantly boost their confidence and readiness.

Embed accessibility features across modules. Closed captions for videos, downloadable transcripts, alternative text for images, and clear language for all instructions will make the course inclusive for all staff.

Revise quiz questions to integrate scenario-based assessments. For example, present a short case where a staff member needs to automate awarding, and ask learners to select and justify the appropriate tool or troubleshoot errors.

Create opportunities for peer feedback on reflection journals. Allowing staff to comment on each other’s reflections will promote professional dialogue, uncover process variations across departments, and encourage a shared culture of improvement.

Consider adding a final summary module with key takeaways, next steps for implementation, and links to additional Banner resources. This will empower staff to continue learning independently after the course.