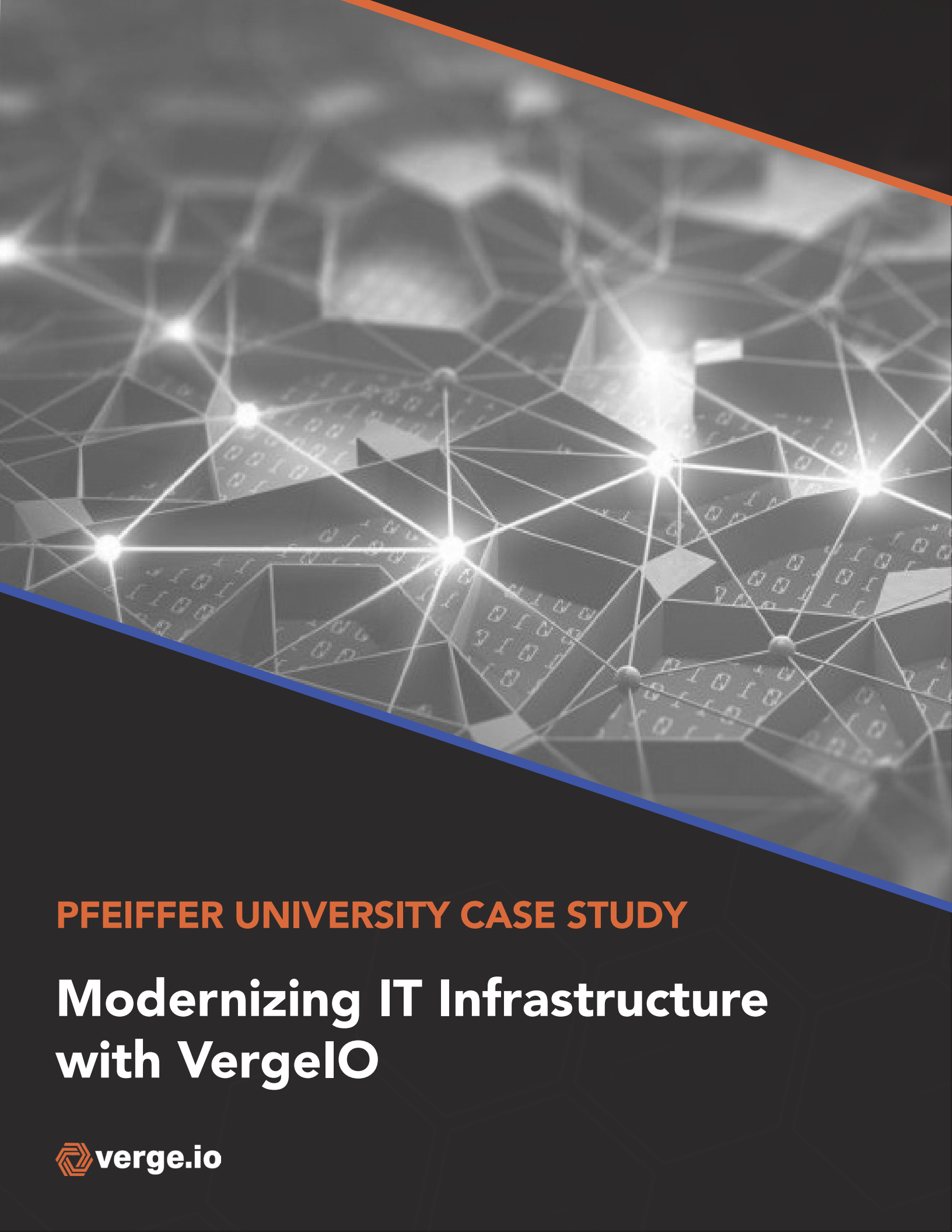




**PFEIFFER UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY**

# Modernizing IT Infrastructure with VergeIO





Pfeiffer University, a private nonprofit liberal arts institution with over 135 years of history, emphasizes personalized education, practical experience, and a strong foundation in the liberal arts. With an 11:1 student-to-faculty ratio and bachelor's and master's programs across more than 32 disciplines, Pfeiffer fosters mentorship-driven learning and a culture of service. Its diverse academic offerings are designed to prepare students for leadership and service in their chosen fields, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

That spirit extends to its IT department, led by Chief Information Officer Ryan Conte. Operating on a lean budget, the department avoids outsourcing and leverages in-house and student resources to minimize costs. By 2024–2025, VMware licensing changes, rising costs, and poor support responsiveness threatened to overwhelm these lean operations. Pfeiffer turned to VergelO not only to modernize infrastructure but also to create real-world learning opportunities for students.

## VMWARE CHALLENGES

VMware had long served as the backbone of Pfeiffer's virtualization environment. However, the shift to per-core subscriptions pushed projected costs to \$35,000–\$45,000 annually, compounded by the elimination of higher-education consortium discounts. Even with paid support, responsiveness was poor. "VMware wasn't calling us back," Ryan recalled.

Hardware concerns added to the challenge. Though the infrastructure was five years old and still viable, MSPs insisted on expensive hardware, which required \$100,000–\$200,000 in new investments.

## SEARCHING FOR AN ALTERNATIVE

Ryan evaluated several options:

- **Public Cloud (Azure, AWS):** As a Microsoft-focused campus, Azure was considered. However, lack of in-house expertise, training, support costs, and security concerns made it unattractive. With redundant internet, fuel-backed generators, and paid-for campus infrastructure, Pfeiffer would have been paying twice for resiliency it already had. "Why should I pay for this twice by moving it to the cloud?" Ryan asked.
- **VMware with Reduced Scope:** Pfeiffer briefly considered continuing with VMware on a reduced scale, running standalone servers without vSAN redundancy. However, the potential for downtime was deemed unacceptable. While critical systems such as the LMS, ERP, and SIS are hosted as SaaS solutions, the university still relies on essential on-premises workloads. Losing redundancy in those areas could significantly disrupt daily operations and impact service delivery to students and staff.

- **Other On-Premises Platforms (Nutanix, Scale):** These platforms were technically viable but required a significant capital investment in new hardware, which conflicted with Ryan's objective to repurpose existing Dell and HP servers. The ideal solution would reuse existing equipment, maintain redundancy, and simplify management without unnecessary costs.

## WHY VERGEIO

VergeIO stood out by directly addressing Pfeiffer's priorities:

- **Hardware Agnostic:** Supported HP Gen9/10/11 and Dell servers. Older Dell servers were repurposed into a DR cluster with NVMe via PCIe cards and SSDs for just a few hundred dollars.
- **Unified Platform:** Integrated virtualization, storage, networking, and data protection.
- **Migration Tools:** Enabled in-house migration of 30–40 VMs. Only ~10% required tweaks, all resolved quickly with VergeIO support.
- **All-in-One Features:** Built-in disaster recovery, replication, ransomware protection, and backup eliminated the need for a separate \$20,000–\$30,000 backup project.
- **Support Quality:** Rapid responses, often within hours, kept the project on track, as well as the ability to book time with an engineer.
- **Educational Value:** Three senior CIS students chose VergeIO vs. VMware for their capstone projects, gaining hands-on experience in data center operations.



**Verge was the only product I looked at that didn't need hardware. Others told me to buy new, but I had good servers with life left. Verge let me use them.**

— Ryan Conte

## IMPLEMENTATION

The migration was designed as both an IT upgrade and an educational initiative. Three senior students — Mathius Dessureau, Jason Giesbrecht, and Justin Giesbrecht — played a pivotal role. All three had served as IT interns and volunteers throughout their time at Pfeiffer, while also competing as student-athletes. Mathius is now employed as an IT Support Technician at TELAFORCE LLC, while Jason and Justin, who double majored in Business and Computer Information Systems, now work in their family-owned construction business. Their contributions to the project provided them with real-world experience and strengthened Pfeiffer's culture of hands-on learning.

Over a three-month proof of concept (January–March), the team trained on VergeIO's interface and built a dedicated development and lab environment. They intentionally stress-tested the system to understand its capabilities and limitations. Key takeaways included the importance of encrypting data at rest from the outset and standardizing on 10GbE connectivity to avoid future rework.



**A VMware alternative isn't VMware with a Verge sticker—it's a different beast, with a different GUI.**

— Ryan Conte

With support from VergelO and AI agents integrated with knowledge bases, the learning curve was manageable. The students found the experience rewarding, graduating in May with the ability to showcase the project on their résumés along with a professional reference from the Pfeiffer IT Department.

## RESULTS AND BENEFITS

### Cost Comparison

|                         | VMware    | Verge.io |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Licensing Subscription  | \$45,000  | \$15,000 |
| Backup & Recovery       | \$20,575  | \$3,000  |
| Server Hardware Refresh | \$100,000 | \$7,000  |
| 3rd Party Support       | \$20,000  | \$2,000  |
| Total Cost              | \$185,575 | \$27,000 |



SAVINGS

\$158,575

85%

### Operational Benefits

- **Efficiency:** Unified license and platform simplified management.
- **Resilience:** Inter-campus replication and local backup clusters improved disaster recovery.
- **Support:** Direct, timely assistance enabled smooth VM migrations and hardware reuse.
- **Educational Impact:** Students gained real-world IT experience through capstone projects.



If you’re a creative solver of IT problems, VergeOS lets you build something really amazing. It’s versatile and hardware agnostic.

— Ryan Conte

## BROADER IMPACT

This project was aligned with Pfeiffer's mission of real-world, servant-leadership education. Students didn't just study IT infrastructure; they built it, from installing hardware components to configuring network aggregation. They documented the process and gained hands-on experience that prepared them for future careers. The IT department's in-house, resource-conscious approach ensured the project remained cost-effective while staying true to Pfeiffer's institutional values.

## FUTURE PLANS

Ryan plans to explore VDI and refresh the CIS lab using VergelO's tenant-based separation features. This will allow students to experiment with virtualization technologies in isolated environments without affecting production systems..

## CONCLUSION

Pfeiffer University's transition from VMware to VergelO demonstrates how a small IT department at a private nonprofit university can achieve major modernization without major spending. By reusing hardware, leveraging built-in features, and involving students, Pfeiffer cut costs, strengthened resilience, and enriched education. VergelO provided a cost-effective, versatile foundation for today's operations and tomorrow's student learning.

