UCI COURTYARD STUDY LOUNGE SCHEDULING SYSTEM

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

UC Irvine's (UCI) new online reservation system reduces costs while providing students increased accessibility to centralized study space in the Student Center anytime they're connected to the internet, using technology relevant to students.

Students expect 24/7 access to the services they need and want most. This is especially true for tech-savvy UC Irvine students. So creating an online reservation system allowing students to reserve coveted study space on campus was a natural choice for enhancing customer service and improving students' overall experience.

The Courtyard Study Lounge Scheduling Automation program was created so students could access our centralized study space in the Student Center anytime, and anywhere they are connected to the internet. In addition, students could now reserve an entire quarter in advance and receive complimentary text-message reminders prior to scheduled appointment begin and end times.

The former system was too restrictive. Students could only reserve space during operating hours and were limited to in-person or telephone reservations. Moreover, students could not book an entire quarter in advance and were limited in the frequency of reservations that could be scheduled.

Active Server Page (ASP) was chosen as the driving technology for its adaptability to rapid application development that would allow our system to grow incrementally while testing, uncovering and eliminating design flaws under an accelerated deployment process. The central challenge would be designing a responsive interface for small, handheld screens that would allow users to select from 208-time slots in a day and allow them to confirm and cancel their reservations conveniently. Many recommendations were discussed and discarded before settling on the final solution.

Automation reduced employee surplus and provided an increased level of service to meet the ever-increasing demands of a growing student population. In addition to substantial cost savings that can be adapted throughout our organization, on campus, and by other institutions, we gained increased analytics for measuring utilization rates, usage trends, and other helpful metrics. Most importantly, we utilized technology making the Student Center more relevant to contemporary student life.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

UCI's API:

Affects 45,000 students annually.

Improved study-pattern data.

MILESTONES

Mar 2016
- Close observation period for monitoring and modifying system.
- Online feedback forms provide post-launch input.
- Students identify further improvements that meet their primary needs and wants.

Dec 2015
- Official launch with students quickly adopting the technology.

Late Nov 2015
- Soft launch during an interim period.
- Both new automation system and former system run simultaneously.

Early Nov 2015
- Project undergoes extensive testing by IT.
- Marketing team conducts pre-launch focus group of 20 UCI students.
- Feedback results in modifications to user interface.
- Useful alterations to all student-facing copy and design completed.

Sep 2015
- Hands-on development begins with anticipation for deployment no later than December.

Attracted 1,753 users, 4,453 reservations and a 67 percent utilization rate in the first academic quarter.

Permitted reservations to be booked a year in advance.

In 107 days after launching, page views increased 225 percent over the previous year.

New pages account for 48 percent of website traffic.

Allowed reservations to be made 24/7, 365 days a year.

OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

By removing large, less efficient, in-person registration stations, the project inadvertently increased lounge capacities by 137 percent to include more computer workstations and comfortable seating for students. Additionally, automating customer confirmations and other messaging reduced a reasonably high level of human error in the former process that we did not fully anticipate.

IMPACT AND BENEFIT

Students benefit from increased usability and convenience. Unlike the former in-person check-in process, reservations are now available in advance for an entire academic quarter. Students can now book multiple six-hour reservations per day, track their usage, cancel unwanted reservations, and receive automated confirmations and text message reminders.

QUALITY, COST, OR DELIVERY

The API eliminated 6,000 staff hours, or a minimum of $60,000 annually, with improved utilization rates and an additional 39 hours of bookable space weekly.

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Observations of student study patterns and conversations with users determined the need for digital signage to inform students of room usage and availability.

2 The system initially allowed for booking one quarter in advance, but analysis of booking patterns and feedback from students prompted the adjustment to one year in advance.

PROJECT TEAM

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ZotMail (Campus wide Email)

Social Media

General Signage

REFERENCES

Courtyard Study Lounge Landing Page: studentcenter.uci.edu/study-spaces/courtyard-study-lounge-rooms

Courtyard Study Lounge Reservations Page studentcenter.uci.edu/cslbook/book.asp

Student Center Study Spaces studentcenter.uci.edu/study-spaces