

UTSA unifies mobility to focus on the mobile-first student

In March 2012, students at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) were greeted by banners throughout campus announcing a new mobile app. Within a month, 8,000 students had downloaded it; however, it wasn't long before the downloads stopped.

"We received a lot of mixed feedback from our students," Bryan Wilson, executive director of infrastructure services, says of the bare-bones app that the university got for free from a longtime vendor, "so they stopped using it."

"The question is, 'What does it mean to be mobile?' If it's just pulling up a website on a mobile device, that's different than really intending to deliver to mobile," says Marti Harris, research director at Gartner. "It has to do with increased capabilities, not just mirroring what you would get on a notebook."

Armed with new insight on what it truly means to shift to a mobile-first mentality, UTSA started again from scratch. The IT team developed a new app that offered most of the services available on UTSA's Automated Student Access Program (ASAP) self-service portal, including accessing course schedules to checking account balances and their LMS. Wilson's team launched the new app in May 2014.

"With zero advertising, the new app had 3,000 new downloads, in addition to 8,000 students who received the

update to the existing app" at the start of the academic year, Wilson says. But this time, it wasn't the banners that drew users. Rather, recommendations from the students who had already tried it drew in more downloads. "It's all word of mouth."

UTSA's new strategy is to make everything available on the mobile site first, then ASAP second, with plans to eventually retire the portal altogether. "The goal is to add one feature each month to the mobile app," says Wilson, who already has a list of about 18 to 20 features to add.

"Students really like that they have one place to go to see what courses they're registered for, look at their assignments, look at the discussions and find out information about their classes," says Jayashree Iyengar, UTSA's assistant director for application development and support.

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UTSA's Mobile Strategy

- We took a step back and asked ourselves where are we really trying to go with this?
- We realized it's not about the app, but rather about the "Mobile First" student.
- We told ourselves: Let's do this better than anybody else.

UTSA's IT Requirements

- SIS and LMS integration
- Solid framework
- Ease of managing various upgrades
- Apple, Android & Windows native app
- Ease of configuration & customization

UTSA's Mobile Partner Requirements

- Student focused
- Expanded functionality
- Feature-rich
- Up-to-date user interface
- Streamlined navigation
- Customized look and feel

