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Final Report

As my final practicum project comes to its formal end, I foremost want to express

gratitude for the support and encouragement of my client, stakeholders, and colleagues. I believe

that this project's success is due in large part to these relationships of open communication and

mutual respect. I am a Financial Aid Counselor for Ohio State University at the Mansfield

campus, and for the last two years, I have also been a student in the Master of Learning

Technologies (MLT) program. At every opportunity, I have tried to merge these two facets of

my life and career, and I am pleased that I can call this project a marriage of the two. I created

an online portal to serve new Ohio State Mansfield students going through the orientation

process.

Context

Ohio State Mansfield is one of Ohio State's five regional campuses—a system that also

includes Ohio State Lima, Ohio State Marion, Ohio State Newark, and Ohio State Wooster/ATI.

Like the other regional campuses, Ohio State Mansfield is much smaller than the Columbus

campus in terms of student population. As of the 2018-2019 academic year, Ohio State

Mansfield enrollment was approximately 1,100 students. We are co-located with a community

college, North Central State College, but we do not provide services to these students with the

exception of shared spaces. Each year, Ohio State Mansfield welcomes approximately 400-450

students each autumn, and 100 or fewer every spring. Ohio State Mansfield is an open enrollment campus, which means the threshold for admission is very low (Ohio resident and no felony conviction).

With this in mind, we often welcome students who were not prepared for college by their high schools, and therefore were not competitive applicants for the Columbus campus. We also are an option for students who may not have considered attending college until later in their senior year of high school, or later. These students then usually miss the application and admissions deadlines for the Columbus campus or other colleges. Students who want to attend Ohio State Mansfield can apply through a "rapid application" process up to a week before classes start. These students almost always miss the opportunity to attend orientation, because they apply so late. Late decision transfer students, or students who are currently serving in the military also often miss orientation.

Client

Broadly speaking, my client is the Office of Admissions at Ohio State Mansfield, as they are the office that leads orientation. For this project, I narrowed my client to one staff member. Dianna Truax is an Admissions Counselor and Orientation Coordinator. She is the person who determines the schedule, content, and stakeholders for orientation each year. I have had a close working relationship with Dianna in the past, and I was glad to be able to work with her again on this new project.

The Learning Problem

As mentioned above, a number of students each year are "missed" by the traditional in-person, all-day orientation process. These students include late/rapid applicants, late decision

transfer students, and military students. In most cases, the solution for these students is a one-on-one orientation session with an Academic Advisor. These sessions are one hour or less and are primarily to help the student create their first semester schedule. There are many additional resources and policies that are taught to students at all day, in-person orientation that are either not taught at all during the one-on-one session or are glossed over quickly. Often it is this group of students that most needs the resources presented at orientation, but they are not able to recall or locate these resources since they were never given the proper instruction. Moreover, the current process places an undue pressure on Academic Advisors to give a synopsized version of a complex and wide-reaching orientation program. Some advisors are up to this challenge and enjoy sharing our campus resources with students and are familiar enough with the material to do so. Others are very uncomfortable with this task, and may skip over it altogether, deciding that their professional obligation ends after creating the student's course schedule. This ultimately does a disservice to students, when there are teaching and learning solutions possible to improve their outcome.

The Project

This project has been a dream of mine since I started the Master of Learning Technologies program in 2017. When I was first hired at Ohio State, 30% of my job description was with the Office of Admissions. I became familiar with orientation procedures and policies, and it quickly became clear that no one was satisfied with the one-on-one process for our rapid application students, specifically. In January of 2019, I met with a group of key orientation stakeholders and began to brainstorm for what became this final project. I spoke with admissions representatives, office support staff, and academic advisors. With that in mind as well as my own experience in the admissions and financial aid office and my burgeoning

learning technologies skills, we determined a web portal that could easily be shared with students would be a good option to meet our goals. This website could be given an easy-to-remember, shortened URL, and printed on half-sheets to be shared with students during their one-on-one orientation with an advisor. For the advisors who felt more comfortable walking through the material with the student, they could visit the site together during their office visit.

U.osu was determined to be the most appropriate place to host this portal due to its Ohio State-approved templates and support. This site can also be transferred or shared with other staff in the case of a job change or retirement. U.osu is also easily customizable and edits can be made quickly and easily, unlike our homepage website. For that site, changes need to be submitted, approved, and then are posted by a staff member in Columbus. This portal would give Ohio State Mansfield staff the freedom, flexibility, and autonomy needed to serve our students well.

Project Goals

The project goals were straightforward, and were closely based on the goals of orientation itself. After meeting with the client and other stakeholders, the orientation goals were as follows:

- Schedule for first semester

- Receive and onboard iPad

- **Know deadlines and procedures**

- **Know campus resources and where to find them**

- **Know how much and how to pay their bill**

The bullet points in bold are what we determined this website portal would be able to provide. Students who complete a one-on-one appointment for orientation will schedule for their first semester, and they will receive their iPad during a make-up session during the first week of classes. Here are the project goals:

- Calculate bill balance using budget sheet

- Identify campus buildings and facilities

- Remember enrollment and payment deadlines

With these goals in mind, I drafted a production schedule that included meeting with my client regularly, collecting current materials and resources used in in-person orientation, revising these resources for the online portal and the learners, and building the site itself.

Project Schedule

Fortunately, I was able to adhere closely to the production schedule I had written. I attribute this to the frequent communication between myself and my client, and the clear expectations we had set for each other. I also believe I was successful in this project because I had been laying the groundwork for it long before the semester began. For future projects in which I might not have as large a stake and personal role, I will need to be especially mindful of scheduling and communication.

Future Plans

Fortunately, I am able to continue working on this project after the semester's end. I have already turned over the portal, as is, and I am happy to report it was shared with the very first rapid application student the following day. After meeting with the Director of Enrollment

at Ohio State Mansfield, it was determined that we will draft an attitudinal survey to share with students who used this portal to determine if it was perceived as a helpful resource when beginning the first semester. Dianna Truax has been added as a website administrator on u.osu and I have plans to meet with the Academic Advising team soon for a demonstration of the product and to gather any feedback they have. I am hopeful that this project is the foundation for a new way of meeting our students where they are, before they even set foot on our campus.