

UOSU.EDU STUDENT SERVICES WEB-SUITE

UOSU.edu: A Proposal for a Universal

Online Student Services Web-Suite

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In order to most effectively serve the students of Oregon State University, all interactive online services will be accessed by entering one website. This site, tentatively called Universal OSU (UOSU.edu), will combine the currently disconnected Online Support Services, Infosu (OSU Online Services), and Blackboard into one easily accessible portal. The objective is for students to log into this inclusive web application on a daily basis and have access to personalized information and online activities based on their unique student profile.

When a student first logs in to UOSU they will find that Banner has already generated a basic profile based upon the information that the student provided to OSU Admissions. This basic profile is customizable, so the student is able to enter more detailed information about themselves such as educational interests, future career goals, activities, leadership experience, etc. The UOSU application will store all of this information in a database and customize all online functions based upon the traits provided in the profile.

Now that the student has a detailed profile, it is time to explore the many functions that are available via the UOSU portal:

- ✦ Advisor-less Advising: Electives are suggested based on availability of courses in future terms that would match the student's future plans, major, and/or interests. Multiple action plans are mapped out showing when certain classes must be taken in order to complete certain major programs. Suggestions are made as to the best time to take classes based on yearly availability. This program does not seek to replace advisors, but to automate the complex process of major/minor requirement navigation. Students would have the option of viewing their possibilities on their own or to explore the many options together with their academic advisor.
- ✦ Registration "E"nhanced: First, the student sees a list of classes that only includes those courses that are actually available to the student. Second, courses are separated into sections. The top section consists of courses that the system deems highly recommended based upon the student's major, minor, interests, and

- remaining core requirements. Lower sections include courses that the student is eligible to register for, but are less relevant to the student's current needs. Third, the student selects a list of courses they wish to take. Finally, as registration proceeds and classes begin to fill, the registration applet sends notification emails and/or text messages in real time indicating both successful registration into courses *and* suggestions for alternate courses that are still available for sections that are full.
- ✎ Reminders “The E-Nag”: The intent of this application is to provide students with information that is crucial to the completion of an academic program. Students are able to receive different levels of reminders by setting what types of information they would like to have emailed or text messaged to them. The same information would also appear in a “reminders” section of the application. Reminders would not be based on a calendar, but on information from Banner such as: “you have X number of credits, you should apply for graduation within the next two terms!”
  - ✎ Activit”E”s Suggestor: Based on the student's major and interests selected in their profile, clubs and other activities are suggested to the student. Included in the suggestion is the contact information of advisors and even a field to type in a message that can be automatically sent to any desired contact person via email. This program will increase student engagement in extracurricular activities by providing a single conduit for all clubs and organizations to reach interested students.
  - ✎ UOSU-lendar: This enhanced calendar system is tied in with the student's profile and shows important dates as related to the student's department, college, clubs, sports, and registered courses; all in addition to university dates. For instance, a College of Agricultural Sciences student majoring in Animal Sciences can see that college scholarship applications are due Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, the New Zealand Study Abroad program application is due April 1<sup>st</sup>, the Animal Sciences chili feed is on March 15<sup>th</sup>, and ANS 301 has been moved to Nash 110 on March 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - ✎ Life After OSU: This handy tool shows information about graduate programs, job availability, and other opportunities, (once again) tailored to meet the needs of the student based upon their profile.
  - ✎ The Major Tree: An application that uses a tree format to show all the possible ways that a person could complete any major and minor degree program combination in the university. Course availability would have to be estimated in some cases, but it will be possible to pick any major and follow the path through courses that the student should take each term throughout their career. Here is how the program works: At first, the tree just looks like a family tree or organizational chart with OSU at the top and each of the colleges listed horizontally below. The student selects a college and the view zooms in placing the college at the top and all of the majors within the college horizontally below.

Now the student selects a major and the view zooms in again with major at the top and options and minor below in various combinations. The process continues in this fashion becoming more specific with each selection on the tree. The level of detail goes all the way down to term at the top and full time course load (number of credits the student wishes to take per term) horizontally across the bottom. Eventually, the student will be able to see all of the possible ways that they could follow a degree program from college selection, to core curriculum, through major/minor completion; all within this tree format. Of course, the tree would be almost infinitely huge, so the student has to continue to zoom in on smaller sections of the tree by selecting pathways to take toward degree completion. Furthermore, the student can backtrack by clicking the shadow of previous branches of the tree that will still be visible at the top of the screen. Otherwise, the student can use the scroll wheel on the mouse to zoom in and out on the tree and click a specific section of the tree as a new starting point. This program would provide hours of enjoyment for decided and/or undecided students and should also be available on the admissions website for prospective students.

- ✦ Kerr 2.0: One stop shopping for all possible Financial Aid, Registrar's, Admissions, and other enrolment management activities within a slick user interface that is easy to navigate and filled with useful tools. In other words, the current online services is completely eliminated and recreated as a state of the art, professionally designed website. Since the visually pleasing, highly interactive navigation screen will require extra bandwidth to load quickly, students will be given the option to choose a text only version of the page for slower computers.

UOSU is a project spearheaded and led by the division of enrolment management in conjunction with OSU network services. Preparation for implementation will include extensive hours of collaboration between key leaders from enrolment management and a network services UOSU team. Before any coding is done, numerous decisions will need to be made regarding specific aspects of the UOSU functionality. These discussions will be regarding the overall look of the site, which applications should or should not be included, and the type of security measures needed to protect such a large amount of information available through a single log in.

Implementation will bring up a whole new set of challenges and discussions. Considerations will need to be made concerning: the feasibility of creating a universal template (Blackboard will make this a major challenge); the possibility, given computing

resources, of designing and implementing each of the UOSU applications; how to devote enough time to the project that it is completed before becoming obsolete given the numerous other time commitments of enrolment management and network services faculty; and where the money and hours will come from to keep such a behemoth website maintained, operational, and current. Assuming all variables progress toward the possibility of implementation, the actual process of building the website architecture, designing the applications, and collaborating with enrolment management for content accuracy should take nine months. An additional full academic year of testing will be required before UOSU goes live in order to ensure structural integrity.

There are countless challenges that will pose a threat to UOSU becoming a reality. Some of the most pressing will be related to funding and time. In order to accomplish such a huge task, it will be necessary to hire one or more persons to take on the responsibilities that cannot be absorbed by the existing enrolment management and network services faculty. Also, the time needed to design and code all of the interactive UOSU applications may be so overwhelming that it becomes necessary to purchase licenses for already existing software. Requests will need to be made for additional funding. Possible avenues are grants, state funds, and/or technology based foundation funds. In regard to time constraints, implementation cannot be an infinite project. However, the site must be in perfect working order before it is introduced to the students. Therefore, enough time must be devoted to UOSU in order to make this a reality before technology gives way to a newer solution to online student support consolidation.

Although UOSU conceptually provides an ideal one-stop-online-services product for students, it may not even be possible for such a product to exist. In order for the three

most convenient modules – Registration “E”nhanced, The Major Tree, and Advisor-less Advising – to be possible, there needs to be a way to forecast course availability beyond a single calendar year. At present, it is nearly impossible to guarantee a schedule of classes for subsequent years because there are too many variables involved in generating the document. When we consider that faculty members are not permanent employees, buildings often need unforeseen construction, and that degree requirements change with each year’s catalog; it becomes clear that these three automated programs may only provide estimated information – if it is possible for them to provide any information at all.

While the ultimate risk of such a suite of online student offerings is the possibility of wasting time and money on a project that cannot be completed, the potential benefits to student, staff, and faculty are vast. Students will be able to map out their degree program online given a number of different possibilities prior to meeting with their advisor. Faculty will be able to advertise new courses to specific students based on their profiles so that they no longer have to spam student email accounts. Students will be able to register for classes by choosing all of their preferred courses in advance without having to worry about logging on and registering at the perfect time. Admissions counselors will be able to sit down with a prospective student and navigate The Major Tree, which will amaze the student with our technological prowess while looking over possible degree programs at OSU. The possibilities, once UOSU is fully implemented, do not stop at project completion. UOSU will provide the foundation for an expandable and upgradeable online student services suite that will once again put OSU on the electronic map because of our commitment to student services and technological innovation.

Reference

*Information and Resource Links for Current Students of Oregon State University.*

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