Improve Communication to Current HSU Students (Revamp U-Notices)

General

Account/Department
Information Technology (IT)

Created
Sun 10/2/16 10:44 AM

Description
The communications we have developed for current students has focused on academic content, paying fees, and repeating various registration or application deadlines. In short, most communications are about the "logistics" of being a student and what they need to do to maintain student status. The communication gap for current students really needs to be evaluated and understood before any solution is brought forth, and there are existing communication outlets that can improve or enhance that communication with minimal effort and no cost. What is missing is the user voice; the voice of the student to help us determine the need and functionality associated with improving the communication channel to our most important resource, students.

Requirements
The main requirement of the project would be to solve how to close the "communication gap" mentioned above in the description, by identifying the functional and technical communication needs for improving the current state of student communication channels.

Divisional VP:
Peg Blake - Enrollment Management & Student Affairs

Estimated annual initial costs:
0

Estimated annual on-going costs:
0

Funding Availability?: 🌱
No Hard Costs

Portfolio Type: 🌱
Student Services: Non-instructional activities that contribute to student’s success.

Portfolio Type Alignment: 🌱
Improving communication with students about events promotes student success when they are more engaged with the campus community.
Requestor name: Elizabeth Morgan

Project Champion: Peg Blake

Primary Customer(s): Campus-wide

What problem are you looking to solve?: The current University Notices system is approximately 20 years old and does not provide a user friendly interface or ability to sort or filter notices. Events and opportunities are missed because things are not presented in a categorized or user friendly way. This suggests that perhaps student communications channels as a whole should be reimagined, at least for how campus community events are communicated to students. This could expand to include a look at the MyHumboldt portal, Events site, as well as other channels.

Which departments or processes are affected?: Everyone on campus receives the University Notices email. Only certain people on campus can submit University Notices.

What is the consequence of not doing this project?: We would continue to use the existing University Notices system.

What would a successful solution look like?: While a successful solution could just focus on the technology tool, we recommend that the university engage in re-imagining communications with current students. We could imagine this might include people from Student Affairs MarCom, and key student-focused units (Clubs, Associated Students, and the various Centers for Academic Excellence). The outcome of such an analysis could result in the need for changes to our existing communications systems (including University Notices), which could be proposed at a later date.

How else might you solve this problem?: Alternative 1: It is possible that some of this information/features is available on the Events site and that tool needs to be advertised both to people who might host events as well as the campus at large who would like to learn about them.

Alternative 2: This could be integrated into the myHumboldt Portal, but would need to be more broad/casual for relevant posts for students than what is currently announced to students.

Student Success: There appears to be consensus that social engagement contributes to student success. We believe improving the communication channels for students to learn about events and social engagement opportunities will contribute to a supportive and engaging environment. We might expect to measure success by seeing a greater number of events promoted on various communications channels as well as better participation/attendance at events. Satisfaction with tools could be measured via surveys or focus groups before (current state) and after.

“Supportive Environment Institutions that are committed to student success provide support and involvement across a variety of domains, including the cognitive, social, and physical. These commitments foster higher levels of student performance and
satisfaction. This Engagement Indicator summarizes students' perceptions of how much an institution emphasizes services and activities that support their learning and development. Items include:
How much does your institution emphasize the following:
Providing support to help students succeed academically
Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing center, etc.)
Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.)
Providing opportunities to be involved socially
Providing support for your overall well-being (recreation, health care, counseling, etc.)
Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
Attending campus activities and events (performing arts, athletic events, etc.)
Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues”


"Social Engagement
If students simply go to class and then go home without engaging in campus activities, they are less likely to be retained. For over 30 years, researchers and practitioners have been stressing the importance of successful social integration for student success. The establishment of friendships with peers, the development of mentors and connections to faculty members have been identified as important factors for student integration (Swail, 2004). For students from underrepresented populations, it is important to remove cultural barriers so that students can connect to the campus community (Tinto, 2004). The act of socially integrating into a campus community has been shown to be a cumulative process (Swail, 2004) so it is essential for students to connect to the campus culture early on in their academic experience. Participating in student organizations and engaging in campus social traditions can also positively influence institutional commitment and retention.”

What resources will this project require?:
Student and student services perspective: We would need feedback from customers about what needs and functionality are needed for effective, user-friendly tools to connect students to information that is more social, co-curricular, and/or activity-related to students.
Marketing/Communication: We would need involvement from someone in MarCom about improving communication opportunities and interfaces.
Technical: We may need to include Drupal, APEX, Portal, and Event site technical resources to fully understand what is available now, and perhaps what can be expanded/developed further in the current tools and platforms.
Project Management or Facilitation of sessions aimed at gathering input from students and student services units.

And is your deadline a hard deadline?:
No

Explanation of annual estimates:
Technical solutions may need to be created or changed. At this time, we do not expect any costs to be incurred for analysis, and subsequent implementation or ongoing maintenance.

Type: 
Replace

Affected or Related Systems/Modules: 
Other Affected or Related Systems/Modules:
Campus Events Site

Considerations / dependencies:
The current University Notices tool is over twenty years old. Despite the process being very simple, restricted to summary information and technically outdated, there are a growing number of people who use the service to get the word out about various events. The technical process that makes U-Notices work may not work indefinitely, so it is important to consider the fact that it could stop working. It makes sense gather information about what students need now so the information can be used to re-create the service of U-notices, in the event it breaks, or use the information to move forward with a more functional platform to serve the student and student services needs, once they are understood.

Information Technology (IT) Feasibility Statement: ☑
The communications we have developed for current students has focused on academic content, paying fees, and repeating various registration or application deadlines. In short, most communications are about the "logistics" of being a student and what they need to do to maintain student status. The communication gap for current students really needs to be evaluated and understood before any solution is brought forth, and there are existing communication outlets that can improve or enhance that communication with minimal effort and no cost. What is missing is the user voice; the voice of the student to help us determine the need and functionality associated with improving the communication channel to our most important resource, students.

The main requirement of the project would be to solve how to close the "communication gap" mentioned above in the description, by identifying the functional and technical communication needs for improving the current state of student communication channels.

If scope is limited to replacing University Notices only, this could be done either as a Drupal site using a member of the ITS web site support team, or as an APEX app using an ITS programmer. If work is to be done on the Events site, an ITS programmer will need to learn about that site or we will need to involve MarCom on changes to that site. One simple idea would be to integrate a Twitter or other social media feed into an existing resource such as the Portal or Events site, to allow students to post events through social media channels, which (we assume) they already are using.

The work to be done on this project is probably largely along the lines of communication and designing user friendly communications channels that must be better understood before they are changed. Once the functional criteria and end-user needs are gathered, understood, and documented; the next phase could identify current or new solutions that are in use and decide which would meet the requirements best.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:
This project was first focused on the University Notices function, but as we expanded discussions to other stakeholders, we found that the scope of "Improving Student Communication Channels" is broader. The more this topic was discussed the more the implications and impact grew to other venues, platforms and ideas. This is a critical component of how students feel connected to Humboldt State, so we feel that before we feel prepared to change the technology, we need to fully understand how students would want a communication channel that serves them and help them connect to information and events that matter to them.
Project Sizing

Estimated - Epics:
M

Comments:
The size of gathering student and student services input is Medium and can be accomplished within the Spring 2017 semester. Understanding the features available in existing communication outlets and technologies that we use and understanding technical functions that students now use (on their own) or want to use that would make the future system user-friendly and meet functional needs of both students and the many HSU units they are connected with.