



The University of Southern Mississippi Extends Resources and Promotes Student Success with HighPoint Mobile

Founded in 1910, The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) prides itself on its friendly and welcoming atmosphere. A dual-campus institution, USM has campuses in Hattiesburg and Long Beach, in addition to five teaching and research sites in Mississippi and through online courses. Currently, 896 faculty members serve approximately 14,500 students who can choose from more than 140 undergraduate academic degree plans and 200 masters and doctoral degree plans.

CHALLENGE:

Do More with Less

One of the greatest benefits USM offers its students is a quality education for an affordable tuition. Because the university is a state funded school, this isn't always easy. As with most state schools, budgets are continually being cut and are directly tied to student success, forcing staff to do more with fewer resources.

The services and information students require is often locked away in student information systems that only administrators can access. Students are then required to schedule appointments, wait in lines and depend on staff to complete basic tasks. Craig realized these multiple steps not only discouraged students but required dedicated resource time, a luxury she simply did not have.

While the school offered some information and the ability to complete certain tasks on its student intranet web page, such as course enrollment and financial aid data, not every student owns a computer. They would have to locate library computers between classes and only during library open hours.

"We wanted to give all students the same access to data," explains Craig. "We put the students first and realized their world revolves around their mobile phones. Not every student has a computer but we found nearly all of them have a mobile phone. Giving them mobile access on their terms became a top priority."

SOLUTION:

Maximize Resources with HighPoint Mobile

USM didn't want to roll out just any mobile functionality. They wanted to ensure every feature was geared towards actual student needs. Craig and her team asked themselves, "What are the things we could include in a mobile app that would help students be successful, especially new students trying to acclimate to our campuses?"



"If I have to direct resources, it would be to providing services and information students need to be successful," says Valerie Craig, manager of Technology Applications and Services at USM. "For new students, whether they are a recently graduated high school senior or transferring from a junior college, we want to give them the best start possible."

Valerie Craig
Manager Technology Applications and Services
The University of Southern Mississippi, iTech

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Since all of their student data is housed in PeopleSoft, USM wanted a mobile application that would seamlessly integrate with the student system. They found their solution with HighPoint Mobile. Being that it is transaction based, every change in the HighPoint Mobile app is immediately reflected in the PeopleSoft database without any resource involvement. “Students need to see their changes right away, no matter if they are using a computer or a mobile app.,” says Craig. “No other mobile solution could offer us the real-time integration like HighPoint.”

The HighPoint Mobile app is fully customizable, making it simple for Craig to make changes to fit the look and feel of the app to reflect their school. The students can further customize their app dashboard with the information most important to them, such as how much they owe and their schedules, their personal advisor contact information for easy access. Students can make financial aid payments; pay fees; pay for housing, parking and books; and even communicate those costs with parents.

The HighPoint Mobile app's tight integration with PeopleSoft enables students to do virtually all of their administrative tasks whenever they want. Students browse and enroll in courses; check grades, schedules and financial aid; see a map of their classes and a schedule of upcoming events; and view their academic progress to see which classes have been successfully completed and which ones remain. Specifically geared towards new students, the app identifies their personal advisor contact information for easy access. Students can make financial aid payments; pay fees; pay for housing, parking and books; and even communicate those costs with parents.

RESULTS:

A Mobile App No One Can Live Without

Even though utilizing HighPoint Mobile requires fewer USM resources to provide an excellent student experience, Craig need look no further than the app analytics to gauge its success. The school knows to be ready every year the day before and the first day of class each semester. The students use it, want it, and now, can't live without it, according to Craig.

“Our students are using the HighPoint Mobile app for the business of being a student and are more self-sufficient than ever,” says Craig. “It’s not for frivolous things but for a mobile version of PeopleSoft. Ultimately, students want to be successful and providing them a means to help them navigate their educational journey is no longer a novelty or an add-on but a critical component to the fabric of the technology.”

When it's time to upgrade features, Craig gathers leaders from admissions, registrar, financial aid, academic advisement, graduate school and international admissions around a table to test the new version before deploying to students. “These leaders are IT’s customers and they own the student data,” explains Craig. “Engaging them ensures we have buy-in - that they understand the value of the mobile app and how IT services is providing for the needs of students. I know the services IT provides students are legitimate and that the university is ready to support and promote the mobile app to students.”