Team Recognition Award Nomination

UC Davis Advising Virtual Front Desk

Submitters:

- Jeremy Phillips, IT Director, College of Letters and Science, jmphillips@ucdavis.edu
- Tracy Grissom, Director of Advising and Policy, College of Letters and Science, tsgrissom@ucdavis.edu

UC Locations: UC Davis

Award Category: Design Award

Nomination for:

- Fei Li, Lead Application Developer, College of Letters and Science, flcli@ucdavis.edu
- Jarold Wong, Application Developer, College of Letters and Science, cwjwong@ucdavis.edu
- Edgar Duran-Perez, Application Developer, College of Letters and Science, eduranperez@ucdavis.edu

Narrative:

Returning to in person instruction from the pandemic, student expectations for and behaviors around advising have changed. At the same time, the need to connect with our students and provide them with services to support their educational goals has never been more urgent. During our first quarter back on campus, we quickly realized that students were no longer choosing to visit advising services in person—what had been long lines at our advising offices had become a trickle, and the demand for online appointments was overwhelming. While we had systems in place to handle online advising by appointment, the missing piece was immediately available drop-in advising. We initially tried using Zoom to fill this need, but we quickly found that between FERPA/privacy concerns and limitations in the technology, we were not able to meet the demand. We looked for commercial solutions, but everything we found was a component of a larger student advising/engagement or other student information system. That led us toward developing a custom solution.

In less than five months, Fei and the team he leads were able to develop and deliver the Virtual Front Desk, which launched in April 2022. Since the launch, more than 800 students have received advising services via this new platform—more than we would have been able to serve in person before the pandemic. We knew from the inception of this project that the need for an online drop-in advising platform extended beyond our college and beyond our university, so the team developed the system to be easy to share with other advising teams at UC Davis and across the UC system. In June, the system will be available to any advising team at UC Davis, and we plan to make it available to other campuses shortly after. Fei will be presenting the Virtual Front Desk at UC Tech along with the offer to make it available to any UC campus. Given the transformative impact this tool has had on advising in one college, we expect that it can easily serve tens of thousands of students within the next year—and what could be more aligned with the UC mission than helping our students attain their educational goals?

Additional information about Virtual Front Desk, including a screenshot tour, is available at the project website: https://getvfd.ucdavis.edu/

Tracy Grissom provides the following additional statement supporting this nomination from the advising perspective:

Hello,

We would like to voice our support of Fei Li and his team for the "Design Award" for creating the College of Letters & Science Undergraduate Education & Advising Virtual Front Desk (VFD).

There are 15,000 students in our college – many of which we would not have the ability to meet were it not for this new Virtual Front Desk.

We want to shout from the rooftops that Fei & Team are amazing!

In terms of complexity – our office previously was using a Zoom room for triaging students and sometimes students would wait upwards of 40 minutes. Fei & Team built an overlay for zoom that allows the VFD to triage for us and now the average wait time is 5 minutes or less.

They created a warm & friendly landing page with professional graphics and visual appeal to make the students feel welcomed and comfortable while they wait. In terms of the features:

- We can have multiple advisors working within the system which is something we did not have before.
- We can capture the reason for why the student is visiting in their own words
- We can provide additional links to services
- We can measure wait time
- We can provide students quick access to advising – we are taking a stream that was filtered by one person virtually or a physical front desk (that did not take into consideration mobility challenges, scheduling challenges or general inconvenience of having to navigate this big campus and get to the Social Science Building).

The impact on the advisor side is it keeps the queue organized, allows us to capture the reason for why students are visiting and gives advisors information before meeting that we did not have before. Lastly and of great importance, the VFD is FERPA compliant and allows for CAS authentication for security purposes.

The key values and mission alignment –

- Access – more students are reached and more advisors can participate.
- Affordability - avoiding vendor purchases or waiting for zoom to make improvements.
- Excellence – the waiting room graphics, the professional presentation, the increased speed of communication, etc. all lead to a dramatic improvement both for the student experience and staff.

Currently the rest of the College of Letters & Science (60+ Majors are served) is eagerly waiting for the completion of our Pilot of the VFD so they can benefit from the amazing platform and services from Fei & Team.

We sincerely hope you will recognize their incredible contribution.