

**Larry L Sautter Award Nomination:
UC Merced Office of Information Technology Behind the Scenes Webinar Series**

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Locations Represented: UC Merced

Award Categories: Sautter Award for Innovation in Information Technology

Name of Project: UC Merced Office of Information Technology “Behind the Scenes” Webinar Series

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Team Members External to OIT: Chris Abrescy (Campus Creative Director), Alvin Cha (President, UC Merced Staff Assembly), Derrick Devnich, (Director, UC Merced Center for Data Services), Lisa Perry (Director, Students First Center), Jessica Gardezy (Director, Internal Communications), Joseph Garcia (Manager, University Web), Sean Pamer (Information Technology and Resale Category Manager, Procurement), Jennifer Taylor (Internal Communications Coordinator)

Project Summary: As part of our response to our unit’s Administrative Review in 2019, the UC Merced Office of Information Technology (OIT) decided to launch a year-long webinar series to increase outreach to campus partners and enhance end-user understanding of OIT resources. We have limited resources and countless competing priorities (something to which most UC IT staff can likely relate), so though our webinar series was first and foremost an effort to create a series of live, regularly occurring events to capture campus attention, it was also a strategic effort that allowed us to:

- grow our staff’s capacity for clearly communicating their highly technical work to end-users
- grow our staff’s capacity for creating and delivering engaging presentations
- coordinate with multiple units to produce graphics and videos that can be used later as standalone assets for websites, campaigns, and even our annual report

Additional Resources:

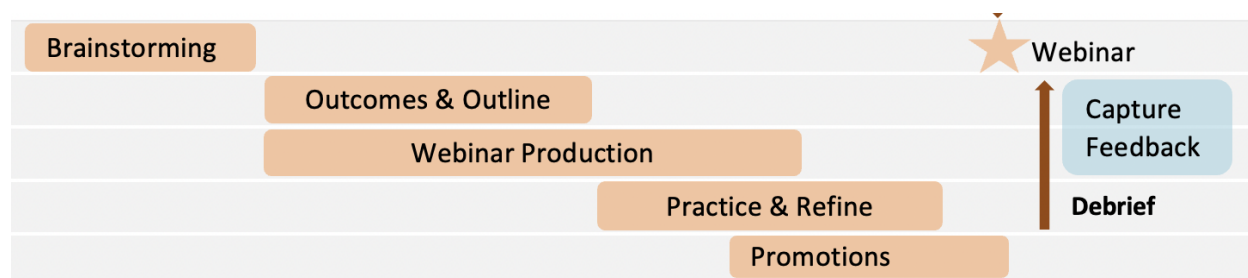
- The [Behind the Scenes Webinar Series webpage](#) - abstracts, recordings, and resources for the 11 individual webinars that made up the 2021-2022 programming year
- The [Behind the Scenes Kaltura page](#) that includes webinar recordings and the [UC Merced OIT Incident Movie](#), the [AET Team Intro](#), and [The Story of Connect](#)

Project Narrative

As a maturing group on a rapidly growing campus, our unit has struggled with getting campus stakeholders to include us early in the planning stages of large projects with significant IT components, to ask for help when they need general technology solutions, or even to understand basic IT offerings. When proposed as part of our response to Administrative Review in 2019, the Behind the Scenes webinar series was intended to be a sustained campaign to grow campus awareness of and engagement with our general offerings and to educate campus stakeholders about specific technologies and focus areas.

In mid-2020, when it became clear that OIT's response to the COVID-19 pandemic would significantly delay any staff planning and production for this project, we hired a UC Merced student to kick off the effort by sorting through our unit-wide planning and brainstorming materials and interviewing individual OIT teams to get a sense for what an uninformed user might need to know, creating a general framework for the effort, a number of possible webinar topics, and some initial marketing materials for the effort. (Christian Ortiz is still part of our team to this day—he graduates in August—and he has had a significant hand in the creating the video and digital assets that make up the lasting impact of the effort.)

In spring of 2021, the OIT Cabinet selected and fleshed out webinar topics for production, then project leader Christy Snyder assembled a small team to develop the webinar creation process. The group created a set of shared resources for the effort (a standard PowerPoint template, pre-and post-webinar checklists, a document detailing good presentation standards, as well as templated promotional materials and communications plan) and tested their process by creating an internal webinar to socialize the series with OIT staff. Ultimately, we created a 12-week process for webinar production that looked something like this timeline:



Teams of presenters for individual webinars were assigned by subject matter and typically committed 1-2 hours a week over the 12-week period. The subject matter experts – ie, members of the Information Security team for the Cybersecurity webinars or members of the A/V team for the Classroom Support webinar – would meet weekly with the webinar coordinator, first brainstorming to identify their specific audience and key topics, then creating appropriate learning objectives for their intended audience, developing an outline for their webinar content and drafting slides, refining slides, and practicing delivery a number of times until they ended up with a clean, polished presentation.

Practically, each webinar included a general introduction to the topic at hand, a quick overview of the topics to be covered and to set expectations, some mix of live presentation and pre-recorded content designed to fulfill specific learning objectives, and a 10- to 15-minute Q&A session designed to build in more specific engagement.

Though the signal-to-noise ratio for campus technology users was high before the COVID-19 pandemic and higher still as it progressed, the webinar series proved an ideal project to launch during the 2021 academic year. It was Zoom-based, which allowed us flexibility during a time of frequently-changing COVID conditions and restrictions, and it helped our staff to reconceptualize how and why to connect as our campus returned to its “new normal.” As the very idea of and expectation for engagement continued to change, what better time to practice effective communication and think deeply about why our users should care about what we do?

Over the course of the Behind the Scenes effort, OIT got seriously creative. We made a [low-rent movie about a fake campus incident](#) to demonstrate our incident management process, an [infomercial](#) to promote underutilized classroom document viewers to faculty, and an [animated short](#) to tell the story of how our campus app and desktop portal came to be. We [taught attendees how to avoid security breaches with old Dilbert cartoons and a demonstration of the John the Ripper program](#). We made a [use-case animation](#) explaining how the cloud services we offer could save a campus department time and resources. We [recorded a digital walkthrough of our campus research computing environment cluster](#) new users will be able to refer to for years to come. All of this is now housed on a [Behind the Scenes webinar page](#) that we will continue to promote as a comprehensive campus resource, especially when onboarding new campus staff.

From July 2021 through April 2022, UC Merced OIT produced 11 [campus webinars](#) and 1 [internal webinar](#) on a variety of topics. On average, the initial campus reception of this effort was less than spectacular: we averaged 32 registrants and 25 attendees per webinar—a number which represents around 2% of our total campus staff. However, we’ve continued to leverage webinar recordings and video assets throughout the year, each of which have averaged 42 views per asset—almost double the average attendance per event. We also have social media promotion of each topic planned throughout the summer of 2022 and plans to promote “replay” events over the 2023 academic year to get even more traction out of this initial effort. Finally, we found that our Q&A sessions were very well received—which resulted in plans for more “Ask Me Anything”-type of webinar offerings in the future.

Perhaps most importantly, the Behind the Scenes effort was a sustained effort in building communications skills with nearly half our OIT staff. During their involvement in the project, OIT staff spent their time thinking critically about *who* their audience is, *what* it is critical that audience know, *why* they should care and *where* we should meet them. This may prove more impactful than any specific webinar, as the ability to communicate clearly about our work and its impact is arguably the most critical skill that IT staff can possess.