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Final Copy of Case Study

Status:
Laureate

Year:
2013

Organization Name:
Federal Student Aid

Organization URL:
www.ed.gov

Project Name:
The Integrated Student Experience

Please select the category in which you are submitting your entry:
Innovation

Please provide an overview of the nominated project. Describe the problem it was intended to solve, the technology or approach used, how it was innovative and any technical or other challenges that had to be overcome for successful implementation and adoption. (In 300 words or less.)

In an effort to help Americans responsibly manage student loan debt, in June of 2012, the President issued a Presidential Memorandum to the Secretaries of Education and the Treasury to improve information available to responsible borrowers about student loan repayment options and enact tools to streamline the loan repayment application process. As part of the Memorandum's key deliverables, the Department's Office of Federal Student Aid was charged with creating integrated online and mobile resources for students and former students to use in learning about Federal student aid, including an explanation of the various options to cap monthly student loan payments based on income. FSA's vision is to be the most trusted and reliable source of student financial aid,

information, and services in the nation. Yet, FSA currently disseminates financial aid information to students through more than 14 websites (see appendix 1) and faces a number of challenges, including content inconsistency and redundancy across websites, multiple authentication requirements for a comprehensive view of financial aid portfolios, and duplicate administrative and resource requirements for the management and support of multiple websites. The Integrated Student Experience (ISE) aims to change the status quo by providing students and parents with an enhanced customer experience across the student aid lifecycle, eventually increasing financial aid awareness and attendance while simplifying the application and servicing process. The initial launch of this project (www.studentaid.gov, the new flagship Federal Student Aid site for information for students/borrowers) provides a "one-stop-shop" for students and parents for information related to financial aid, applying for federal aid, navigating the college decision-making process, and more. Beneficiaries of this effort include all prospective students and their families, current college students, borrowers in repayment, and those that influence and inform students and borrowers.

When was this project implemented or last updated? (Please specify month and year.) Has it incorporated new technologies and/or other innovations since its initial deployment? (In 300 words or less.)

FSA launched the ISE initiative to establish an integrated, customer-focused web experience for students, parents, and borrowers to facilitate decision-making about funding a postsecondary education. On July 15, 2012, FSA unveiled StudentAid.gov (see appendix 2), the first step in a multi-phase project to provide consumers with a one-stop website where they can access federal student aid information, apply for federal aid, repay student loans and navigate the college decision-making process. ISE simplifies and streamlines FSA's web presence by consolidating content from 14+ sites into studentaid.gov and by standardizing web content to single, plain speak voice. Utilizing a vast majority of in-house, internal resources, FSA executed the following: developed web designs and tested the designs with focus groups; rewrote all student-facing content into plain language; installed a content management system that serves as a repository for information to be used on our websites, publications, in new media, etc., to facilitate seamless updates to these forums for FSA business owners; utilizing responsive design technology, the StudentAid.gov portal serves as the Department's first customized web platform for tablets, smartphones and other mobile devices (see appendix 3); decommissioned five websites to streamline internal processes and realize significant cost savings; mobile enhanced site also includes integration with FSA's new Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages. The ISE initiative is a major organizational improvement, estimated to generate $1.6M in cost avoidance over 2 years. It is also the Department's designated initiative for the Administration's Executive Order 3571, Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service, issued April 27, 2011. Studentaid.gov will service

the informational, aid awareness and process navigation needs of over 30 million customers each year.

Is implementation of the project complete? If no, please describe the project's phases and which phase the project is now in. (In 300 words or less.)

Launched on July 15, 2012, Phase I of the ISE involved initial informational website consolidation across the FSA enterprise; launch, updates and maintenance for the StudentAid.gov portal; revamp and launch of new media platforms and establishment of a mobile presence. In subsequent phases, work will begin on integrating FSA's transactional tools, such as loan status, entrance/exit counseling, and additional financial aid lifecycle capabilities. FSA will also continue to operate the associated Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages, as well as keep the mobile site up to date to reach customers where they are. FSA is currently building out Phase II version 1.0, which will be a presentation front for our student loan database information allowing customers fast, easy access to their loan data. Other planned improvements include continuing to consolidate and streamline content and functionality from FSA's other key websites to improve financial literacy and accrue additional cost savings for the taxpayer. FSA also plans to offer a career and scholarship search tool, as these are known important components to the college preparation process. On-going enhancements and improvements will be continuously operationalized based on user feedback through surveys, usability testing and focus groups.

Please provide at least one example of how the technology project has benefited a specific individual or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work. (In 300 words or less.)

The ISE initiative directly supports FSA's Strategic Goal A, Objective 5, to enhance customer-facing processes to improve the customer experience, as well as the Department of Education's Strategic Plan Goal 1.1 action to improve the efficiency and effective of the delivery of federal student aid and to provide improve federal student aid service and information to students. FSA expects the following benefits from the ISE initiative: students will be able to access and easily digest FSA static content and information and make greater use of newly available self-service tools; customers will gain improved financial literacy and decision-making skills; and the reduction of 14 websites will create cost efficiencies. The integrated new media initiative represents a significant capacity-building effort as FSA is using internal resources to develop the content and launch customer contacts (tweets/town halls) as well as aggregate issues and respond to customers. As a result of the thousands of original tweets and posts

along with thousands of content-related re-tweets, Google analytics and web trends are registering a significant rise in social media directed visits to key portals. FSA has registered dozens of individual tweets and posts from students, parents, financial aid professionals and influencers discussing the merits of the new website. In addition, numerous organizations, associations and news outlets have provided positive reviews and feedback on the site. Individual comments from student and university users include: "Hey @FAFSA - I think you have done a really good job with StudentAid.gov." "I agree, I was just using the site when you tweeted that." Jayme Jarrett: "@FAFSA has great videos on StudentAid.gov that schools can use." "Could even imbed @FAFSA Twitter stream."

Would this project be considered an innovation, a best practice or other notable advancement that could be adopted by or tailored for other organizations and uses? If yes, please describe that here. (In 300 words or less.)

The project has been lauded as a notable advancement by the Department and the FSA enterprise and has received the following validation from outside entities and the media: Rachael Fishman with Higher Ed Watch recently posted the following: "Studentaid.gov is impressive considering it's a government website. Because it's highly trustworthy, this should be one of the first resources that counselors and advisors send students interested in learning about federal student aid and the FAFSA. The site is also mobile-friendly, so no matter the digital device students view it on, the content rebuilds itself to be readable. One of the biggest assets of the website is that it is in English and Spanish. Troy Miller, Senior Researcher and Policy Analyst with the Florida College Access Network recently wrote: This year a new U.S. Department of Education web resource, studentaid.gov, provides students and families with clearer information about federal financial aid and the financial aid application process. Previously, the information presented to students was disjointed and spread across several different websites. The new website organizes content by commonly asked questions to help users find what they need. Two areas that caught my attention were the resource page and social media tools. The social media tools were especially significant, because institutions have historically been hesitant to engage their students and the public in their work. The FSA Office is now represented on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Storify and Visual.ly, which will hopefully encourage financial aid departments to assert their presence in engaging their students where they are, which is increasingly on the web and on smartphones and tablets. Finally, in the August 29, 2012 edition of the Washington Post, StudentAid.gov was credited as one of federal leadership highlights of the summer.

If there are any other details that the judges should know about this project, please note them here. (In 300 words or less.)

The following metrics gauge ISE's customer impact and engagement to date: In the six month period from its July 15th launch, StudentAid.gov has garnered over 14 million visitors with an average of nearly 70,000 visitors a day. Mobile site accounts for over 1,700,000 visits or about 12% of the traffic. Combining StudentAid.gov and its predecessor--Student Aid on the Web--over 31 million customers visited our main financial aid information portals in 2012. Represents a 10% aggregate increase over the 28 million that visited Student Aid on the Web throughout all of 2011. FSA's Facebook page and YouTube channel were launched July 15, 2012 to provide more channels for communication and engagement. Launched in January 2012, the @FAFSA Twitter account has garnered over 19,000 followers (gaining over 1,000 new followers a month). Facebook has garnered over 68,000 fans and over 190,000 views of our videos on our YouTube channel. Nearly 90,000 visitors directed to our web portals through links in tweets and posts.