

Reflecting on the AS Elections System

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Introduction

In my role as the Interim Program Advisor for the Associated Students at UC San Diego, one of my many responsibilities included managing and testing the development of the student elections system utilized by the Associated Students and the College Councils. The system would be utilized by a few hundred students in the filing and registration round, and later used by thousands during the actual voting period. In this process, it was necessary for me to communicate the needs of our students and department to our contracted programmer and campus technology contacts while disseminating any changes to stakeholders in the systems such as Deans of each college at the institution. In this process, it was important for me to understand the leadership styles of a diverse group of unit leaders and synthesize an effective method of collaboration while communicating various topics in an effective and understandable manner (PLO 3, 7, 8). I was also able to better navigate the stress associated with managing the competing priorities in my role (Personal Goals 3) and better understand the politics that are associated with working in the Division of Student Affairs (Professional Goal 3).

Links to Program Learning Outcomes

The development of a computer software application was one that that is multifaceted and complex. Because of my previous experience working with technology and programming, I was given the task of assisting with the quality assurance testing of the software. Eventually, this role shifted into overseeing the first developmental phase of the software system. In this process, I coordinated with our graphics design team, who initially voiced concern about the graphical identity of the software system. When meeting with the Deans of Student Affairs from each College, they brought up a list of concerns involving usability and workflow. Because of limited time availability, it was also important for me to consider the original business requirements and

balance them with those needs and the corresponding needs of our students and department when requesting additional changes be made to the elections system. Throughout this process, it was important for me to think about the perspectives and needs of each of the leaders. My approach ultimately became focused on the needs that would directly affect a successful election process and providing requests to the development team based on this priority.

In this process, it was crucial for me to communicate effectively and in a manner that would be digestible to each of the parties. The development team wasn't familiar with concepts of marketing, such as graphical identity, or terms for the elections process, such as single-transferable voting. The stakeholders were also unaware of the time and resource constraints because while idea of adding a button might be simple on paper, it might require significant systemic overhauls on the backend. As a result, it became important for me to become educated of the needs of every stakeholder and become competent regarding the terms utilized by each party. In doing so, I was able to effectively communicate and serve as a translator between these parties to produce a successful system.

Links to Personal and Professional Goals

While the elections system eventually became a key component of my role at the Associated Students, it was only one of my many roles. In the process of managing my workflow at the AS, it became important for me to thoroughly consider the different elements of my job and think about deadlines and priorities. When priorities were unclear, I turned to my supervisor for clarification on the immediate needs and deadlines. From there it was a process of utilizing the team to prevent the onset of becoming overworked. This process worked surprisingly well, and I felt like I was able to manage my workload due to the support of my supervisor and team. In working with the different members of my team and within the Division, I was also able to better understand the politics behind each office. For example, when

working with the Deans of Student Affairs, I was able to understand the critical role that they play in College Council elections; and while I did not report to them, their feedback was to be taken seriously not only because of their titles, but because of their close connections to the students that would also be using this system.

Conclusion

Working on the AS elections system was a process that allowed me to explore my interest in technology but also work closely with various campus partners within the Division of Student Affairs at UC San Diego. This process allowed me to integrate different personal interests of mine and also allowed me to practice skills necessary to succeed as a practitioner. The development process not only challenged my coordination skills across various departments but also helped me understand how I can work with different leaders and navigate the politics within a large Division of Student Affairs. The successful deployment and positive feedback of the students using the system from the initial phase proved to be a rewarding experience.