

Project recap

Advising in the OMSCS program currently relies on two unofficial pathways: the Unofficial Course Review Spreadsheet and individual inquiries on the Google+ group. The goal of this project is to create a web application that will make the advising process *scalable* and *repeatable* by organizing course reviews and suggesting courses to students.

Project status

In my project proposal, I referenced an axiom in the vein of “No plan survives first contact with the user.” In reality, my project didn’t even do *this* well; this week (before dragging in my first batch of users) I started to realize that the original plan had a major flaw...

This week we are gearing up for registration; everyone has received time tickets, and registration will begin on Oct. 30th. As I started looking forward to my own time ticket, it hit me that I should really be capitalizing on the surge of interest in registration to publicize and attract beta users for omscs-advisor.

I had started out by building a very simple planner page with basic customization.¹ The original plan was to proceed to saving preferences, through configuring and viewing the profile, to course search/index/info pages, and finally to the “review course / add course [to user’s history]” functionality near the end of the project (followed only by the import of existing review data from the UOCRSS²). However, when I looked at omscs-advisor from the perspective of a *current* student, I realized that it isn’t useful to me with the current feature set. I need it to know about the courses I’ve already taken before the plans it offers me are useful. In addition, all of the others I had identified as good alpha users are returning students. Argh!

Open question to readers

There are several major features planned for omscs-advisor during the remainder of the term:

- Allowing users to record past courses taken (and reflecting those in the suggested plan).

¹ You can view this at /* TODO: insert URL when Namecheap DNS recovers */.

²

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zJp3Bu2Rb4DRpHLYL2r4nZ210Y2u8eFY7xgQxO4mq7o/edit#gid=1895892548>

- Allowing users to create a profile with their saved plan and preferences.
- Allowing users to add “friends” and see which friends are in which courses.
- Allowing users to review courses.
- Allowing users to browse course reviews.
- Allowing users to browse other course info (in the advisor interface, not by linking out to the official site as it does currently).
- Incorporating past reviews from the UOCRSS.
- Updating the planning algorithm for any of the following items:
 - Additional preferences (like or dislike group projects, like or dislike proctored exams, etc.)
 - Different availability between terms (e.g., 10 hours/week one term, 25 hours/week the next)
 - Prefer courses that can be used to satisfy multiple “preferred” specializations, rather than just one
 - Prefer courses that can be used to
- Updating the planning UI to clearly communicate which preferences were satisfied, which were not, and why. (E.g., warning a student when their preferred number of hours was exceeded because they couldn’t graduate on time without it.)
- Obtaining proper numbers (from UOCRSS) for effort estimates on new courses.

If you were using omscs-advisor in the next ~week to plan your courses, how would you rank these features?

If there’s anything that you hope for that’s not on this list – please mention it!