**Project Milestone 2 To-Be Report**

**Centralized Application System:**

**Common Application**

**Grad Gurus, Group 1:**

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**Executive Summary**

This project talks about how to improve the application called Common App, a well-known app for applying university. The idea behind the Common App is to try to reduce the barriers that students face when applying to college. It does eliminate the problem of investing time for each and every college application individually.

But there are some issues that can be solved to make it more attractive. For example, it is only applicable for undergraduate student and only allows self-reporting of test scores. Moreover, the member schools are limited to certain geographical locations and once student submits all the documents, there is no option to recall.

We come up with four strategies to make the app better. First, add a new function for graduate student to apply university. Second, build connection with ETS to get score directly. Third, add more member school in new country and city. Fourth, give applicant permission to make a change after submission.

Report also provides details of work system, opportunity & its improvement, recommended solution and its details, Risk factors and mitigation. Tools such as BPMN and work system snapshot are used to better explain the proposed solutions.

**Introduction and Background**

The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to any of more than 700 member colleges and universities in 49 states and the District of Columbia, as well as in Canada, China, and many European countries. On this system Students are allowed to apply for multiple colleges simultaneously at once with nominal application charges. But, Common App is limited to freshman and transfer students looking for an admission to enroll in a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, the Common App allows students to self-report standardized test scores, but the vast majority of colleges demand direct reporting of scores through the testing agencies.

The organizational context includes internal environment and external environment listed below.

**Internal environment:**

➤It is managed by the staff of a not-for-profit membership association (The Common Application, Inc.) and governed by a 13-member volunteer Board of Directors drawn from the ranks of college admission deans and secondary school college guidance counselors.

➤The step-by-step introduction is very clear to help a student apply. The counselor can give some advice according to a student’s practical situation.

➤ Most of the membership college are private.

**External environment:**

➤The Common App started in 1975, and as of September 2017, 747 colleges accept the Common App. Therefore, the admissions officers who read these applications know the forms inside and out.

➤The Common App is free to use and about 45 percent of the member schools do not charge application fees.

➤The platform is popular, but it is not the only one for college applications. There are other applying platforms also. Many schools allow students to apply online through their websites.

**Major Stakeholders**

➤Students

➤ Parents

➤ Counselors

➤ Colleges/Universities

**Problem Definition**

**work system**

Considering the current issues of the common app, there are some suggestions listed below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Problems** | **Suggestions** |
| Not applicable for graduate applying | Add new function for graduate student applying |
| Only allows self-reporting of test scores | Build the connection with test center to get score |
| Limited to certain geographical locations and member institutes | Add member school in new country and city |
| no option to recall after submission | Give the permission to make some changes |

Solutions suggested above would satisfy applicants with the process.

**Possibilities**

(1) Since the app has connected with many member school for undergraduate student, it’s not a big difference to make it applicable for graduate applying. And the new option will make the app more useful.

(2) Educational Testing Service (ETS) is a non-profit organization and they can send the score either to student or university. If the common app builds the connection with ETS, applicants will be benefit from it.

(3) The common app has much experience to add new member school. Moreover, the app is popular, many university know how it works, which helps to add new member school.

(4) If the applicants are permitted to make change in two days after submission, students will not be so nervous when submitting. Once they forget something, they still have chance to fix.

**recommendation**

**(1)Add new function for graduate student applying**

At present, the common app only applicable for applying undergraduate. The new function for graduate student will enhance the attraction from students.

**(2) Build the connection with test center to get score**

Most universities prefer to get score from ETS, but the common app only allows self-reporting of test scores, which prevent many students applying school by the app. If the app can build connection with ETS, that would help applicant to apply more schools together by this app.

**(3) Add member school in new country and city**

The common app mainly aims at school at in United States, Canada, China and Europe. But students want to apply school in different counties and cities, in this case, applicants need to apply by this app and then apply separately for some other school.

**(4) Add option to recall after submission**

There are many documents for applying school. It’s different to make sure everything is right. If there are several opportunities for applicants to make some changes after submission, that would be easier and very helpful.

**Details in “AP” and “RJ” Level**

In his analysis of the Work System Method (WSM), Alter concludes that the most complete Work System Method consists of three main steps: system and opportunity (SO), analysis and possibilities (AP), and recommendation and justification (RJ). Also, there are three levels of detail designed for the WSM to be used in. Level 2 consists of analysis through sets of questions specific to each step. It’s extremely beneficial when utilized as a checklist to organize one’s own analysis or ensuring that certain facets of the work system aren’t emphasized more than others. At this point we will focus on steps AP and RJ, and analyze from a Level 2 perspective.

The AP questions in Level 2 focus on helping to have a balanced view of the work system and its large spectrum of possible improvements, all during analysis and design efforts. Ultimately, the objective here is to get away from the notion that the work system is solely the information and software.

**AP1 states:** “

**AP5 states:** How might better information or knowledge help? The ways in which better information and knowledge can help are countless. However, the biggest has to be in the form of improvements. Any piece of knew knowledge could complete a puzzle, in turn resulting in a breakthrough, and then a new upgrade/update. One of the problems that we addressed going from ‘AS-IS’ to ‘TO-BE’ was the issue of coverage. Why are there schools not included in the common app? Well if we were to sit down with common app executives, or executives from some schools not included, we could ultimately uncover the reason for the non-inclusion. Thus, that new knowledge has now gotten us one step closer to the resolving that issue. Another problem was actually the focal point of our new work system: why is there not a work system similar to the common app for graduate programs? Or simply, why doesn’t the common app offer that added functionality? Well, through a meeting with common app executives, we would be able to question them on this topic. Why is it just for undergraduate programs? Were attempts made to branch into graduate program territory? If so, explain. Responses to these questions could be invaluable. If they haven’t tried, we could learn why. If they have, we could learn why it didn’t work or wasn’t plausible. Regardless, we could take all of this information and convert it to knowledge so that we don’t make the same mistakes others have previously made.

The RJ questions in level 2 start by requesting a summary of the recommended changes. The ultimate goal here is to identify inconsistencies and pitfalls in the proposed recommendations. All changes must be addressed and identified, not just those related to the hardware and software.

**RJ1 states:** What are the recommended changes to the work system? The common app is an online service that allows a user to apply to multiple schools all at once. While it has proven to be effective and efficient, we found an issue that we wanted to address. The problem is that the common app is strictly for undergraduate programs. The application and the documents that users are requested to upload all correlate to what the general undergraduate admissions departments at universities require. So our recommended change is to add graduate program application functionality. When creating your account, users will be required to indicate if they are seeking admission to undergrad or graduate programs. Requested information and documents of the users will then correspond to the type of program that they are seeking.

**RJ5 states:** What new problems or costs might be caused by the recommended changes? So, the common app’s current implementation requires that users upload their SAT scores. Users must then go through the SAT’s governing body, CollegeBoard, to request that their scores be uploaded from CollegeBoard into the user’s common app account. This implies that a relationship must exist between CollegeBoard and the common app. By adding graduate program application functionality, we are now adding new possible user requirements. Included in these requirements are GRE and TOEFL scores, which are governed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). So in implementing this new functionality, our success is now dependent upon the cooperation of ETS. If for any reason a relationship cannot be formed, then our recommendation is rendered useless.

**“TO-BE” process**

From the above identified problems, the following reflect the improvements we actually seek to implement to the current common App system based on

-Feasibility

- Exclusiveness to the common App(Scope): some challenges of present system stem from other entities (outside of the common App) not being considered in our BPMN (E.g the schools administration and its processes which has to do with applications not being recalled)

- Inadequate information about schools, application processes, standardized tests and administering body in other countries. (On adding more schools across new locations)

The current Common App design is for students applying for undergraduate programs only. Being graduate students ourselves we have first hand experience with the graduate application process and know it’s just as tedious as it is with undergraduate. Graduate students will also benefit greatly from a system that helps to organize their application and submission of requirements for graduate admission.

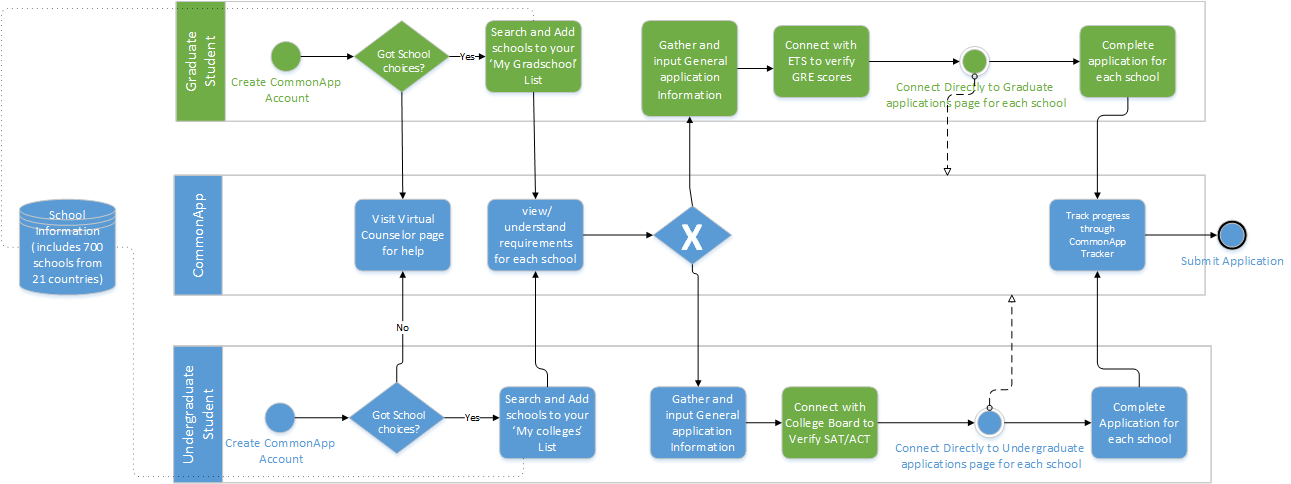
|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| To-be Common App Should... | Shouldn’t... |
| Help students both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, local toUS and international track and manage their admission application process. | Be restricted to just undergraduate applications . |
| Provide verified standardized test scores securely and directly from administering boards. | Allow editing of test scores as provided and verified by ETS or college Board (non editable fields) |
| Considerate in making provisions for international students applying to school abroad especially the US. (E.g use of digital uploading of documents rather than mailing to individual schools and providing as much detail about each school to be sufficient to make decisions without physically visiting) | Be heavily reliant on steps requiring, calling -in, mailing or physically visiting schools (which may be impossible, difficult or really expensive for international students) |

**“TO-BE” Work Systems Snapshot**

Work system changes from AS -IS are highlighted

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Customers | Products & Services | Processes and activities |
| Refers to the people using or products and services of the work system.   * High School Seniors applying to colleges * College graduates applying to grad school. | All outputs of the commonApp that directly contribute to students being able to achieve seamless application   * A platform to manage college applications with interface to 700 schools across the globe. * Expert Virtual Counselor on all things college. * Application dictionary to understand terminology on applications | All steps involved in production of final products and services   * Creating a personal common app account * Adding schools to dashboards * Verifying standardized Test scores * Interfacing with applications for different schools and completing them * Getting expert college selection advice from the virtual counselor |
| Participants | Information | Technology |
| People and machines that perform the work   * Common app (Platform and administrators) * Virtual Advisor experts * Students using common App * ETS/College Board (Test Verification) | Information used and created as participants do their work   * List of schools partnered with commonApp * Account information/ contact information of commonApp users. * Student information for completing application. | Tools used to bring provide or use the products and services of the work system.   * Desk/Laptop * Smart phone for companion mobile app * Databases to store list of partner schools, deadline info, and other requirements for all 700 schools * Secure interface to redirect students to schools application pages |

**BPMN Diagram**



**Bridge any “capability gap”**

Bridging Capability gap is one of the most important tasks in scoping a project. This task involves analysis and assessment of current features, implementing the right set of functions which can improve the business model. Business capability mapping often helps aligning IT strategy with business strategy delivering business capabilities, processes, and functions required for business success. In any project, if existing capabilities are inadequate, a project will be launched to create the capabilities by making change in any of the following areas:

a) Business processes

b) Features of a software application

c) Tasks performed by end users

d) Products that an organization creates

e) Services delivered

f) Etc.

In case of Common App, the major capability gaps between IT and Business strategy are filled by following means;

a) **Improved App Design** – As we know Common App has been called out numerous times in the past for various glitches in the software design, Poor interface performance and speed of interactions. The end user majorly being Students with greater exposure to high end interface and social media experiences, its likely that the expectation would be higher. To satisfy the users community the IT team would be focusing more on the User Experience Design to provide an App which has high reliability , performance quality and customer satisfaction..

b) **Software update and external software acquisition** – As mentioned, the major updates quoted are features to allow Graduate student application, Connection to testing agencies (ETS,PTE,SAT), Incorporate more participating schools (not just member schools) and finally render permission to recall and edit application after submission.

c) **Better understanding of organization (people, Business and Technology) –** Understanding your key customer groups and stakeholder facilitates smoother functioning of organisation and optimize the business model. When you know what favours their satisfaction and what are their expectations from the app, it becomes real easy to deliver modules according to their needs. One way of doing it is leveraging best-practice advice and the experience of business leaders and take time to understand the human, business and technology dimensions specific to your business model. This can be done by Customer surveys and feedback , continuous follow ups and customer support services.

**Benefits estimates and assumptions**

**1. Increased Business growth –** Improved features with seamless navigation and minimal user experience interruption ultimately results in more signup and member partners. On an average considering 20, 000+ student enrolment every semester starting from spring 2018 and calculating the annual capital based on the registrations until Fall 2018, it is expected to reach a target capital income of 3 million USD at a average price of 60$ USD per application processing.

**2. Wider Customer group - With increased trends in market**

Sometimes, market conditions dictates production of new products for new customers. This improvement in Business organisation can render new set of customer groups and increased growth rate. Extending App features to incorporate Graduate student application widens the customer community by 40% generating revenue twice as higher, considering CGS report stating 2.1 million applications for graduate program in the year fall 2014 which is 27.1% times more than freshmen applications. (Resource: http://cgsnet.org/graduate-schools-report-35-increase-first-time-enrollment)

3.Technology usage – Assuming no new purchases in terms of equipment and only considering software acquisition and installation charges, it is expected to save around 0.7 million USD on overall application charges.

**Cost estimates and assumptions**

**1. System Improvement and Support –** Incorporating three to four updates carried out in Agile methodology involving 1 release consisting of 4 sprints each of 2 weeks long with enough time to plan, design, develop and test (SIT,UAT, regression); it would take two month of time costing anywhere between 0.8 – 1.0 million USD

**2. Human resource** - Assuming a team of four people working on the updated version, an average cost inclusive of cross training, new resource recruitment, travel and food , commuters benefits, recreational expenses and salary compensation cost anywhere between 64,000$ - 70,000$ USD considering a yearly package of an employee as 90,000$ USD

**3. System Operation and Maintenance** **–** Assuming minimal cost spent on new equipments, considering only the operational and maintenance charges; it would cost around 50,000 USD on an average for retaining the old ones.

4. **Software Acquisition and Installation –** Assuming purchase of third party vendor software from ETS, SAT covered with 90 days support period, we happen to spend only on the installation and staff training. This would cost around 40-60 % of total application cost marking up to 0.8 – 1.0 million USD

5. **Extended Customer service and Staff Training –** Assuming outsourcing customer services from partner companies (member colleges, Testing agencies, Home IT team) placed at various location, the cost spent on the employment compensation, training, equipments and facilities would cost around 1.0 million USD

**Risks and Mitigation**

**Risk and Political factors**

**1.Undocumented/Illegal Immigrant Students**  
Citizenship Status is asked of students using the Common Application. Articles about the topic and even a ‘Fair Common App’ has been created for undocumented students. Most colleges in the United States will admit undocumented immigrants and, where it asks for Citizenship, they are supposed to select “Other (Non-US)” and answer “No” for holding a valid U.S. Visa. This can apply for certain International students and Graduate students also. This section is definitely a political issue. Since most colleges admit undocumented students, the questions may be removed or appropriately modified. If a college wants to know or is required to gather this information, it should ask the student directly for the answers and any supporting documents. There is a short article called “Group creates 'Fair Common App' for undocumented students” on the USA Today College website that explains more about this topic.  
**2.Relationship with the Government (Bureaucracy)**  
All public colleges and universities have a direct connection to the Government. This is why they cost considerably less than private institutions. Government politics and organizational politics are both influential in applying to, being accepted to, and choosing a college. The Common Application must be up-to-date with all laws and regulations. This could also be a reason why the Common Application asks about citizenship. Like practically every application, such as job applications, questions ask about a person’s Race, Veteran status, and Disabilities. The Common Application is primarily for U.S. colleges and universities. While including more International colleges and universities would be great, that is not the goal of the project. Transfer students are being added to use the real Common Application at this time. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to include a Graduate student application and expand access for International students.  
**3.Cost of Expansion**  
The Common Application is managed by the staff of a not-for-profit membership association known as The Common Application, Incorporated. It obtains the majority of its funding through Charity. More than 250 institutions that use the Common Application do not even require an application fee. Therefore, doing and implementing the project would require many charitable contributions. The upgrade is not expected to be cheap. It would be horrible to run out of money before the project is completed. In this case, the list of features would have to be shortened or more time would have to be given to raise the required amount of money.  
**4.Convincing institutions to accept the application, just like so many have for Undergraduate admissions**  
The Common Application is already the primary medium that students use to apply to multiple colleges and universities for Undergraduate studies. It has an excellent reputation and that same quality must exist in the upgraded version.  
**5.All the involved parties agreeing on the application’s necessities**  
Testing agencies administering the required tests for Graduate studies, colleges and universities offering Graduate degrees, the Government and other parties involved with International students, students, developers, and the application provider must all agree on its necessary features and user interface so that institutions and students prefer using it over going through the current process.  
**6.Finding and obtaining people with the necessary skills and knowledge to build a Graduate application that is International student friendly**  
Developers and Designers should not be an issue to find. However, obtaining specialists with deep knowledge of the subjects, including the processes for International students and different Graduate programs could be an issue.  
**7.Communication and Coordination**  
These are important when working on any group or team project. They are essential, especially for a complex and large project such as this.

**Risk factors and mitigation**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Risk | Impact | Likelihood of Occurrence (L, M, H) | Degree of Impact  (L, M, H) | Action Trigger | Responsibility | Response Plan |
| Government (Bureaucratic) issue(s) | Falling behind schedule | M | M | Taking more than planned to fulfill a Government related problem | Ashritha | Move on while waiting and work on another Government task |
| Project scope change(s) | Falling behind schedule and spending extra money | L | H | Client asks for more features or original features take more time to complete | Michael R. | Deny request or modify schedule |
| Insufficient worker(s) | Gradually falling behind schedule | L | L | Worker(s) not meeting requirements | Yanyun | Talk to or replace worker(s) based on impact |
| Technical issue(s) | Falling behind schedule and possibly spending more money | L | M | It takes over 2 or 3 hours to resolve any technical problem(s) | Temilade | Call technical support or have an additional worker fix problem(s) |
| Phone call(s) or email(s) not returned promptly/Communication issue(s) | Wasting time/ falling behind schedule | M | M | Have not heard back from individual(s) in 3 or 4 hours | Matthew | Contact individual(s) again/contact someone who is close to the individual(s) |

**Works Cited**  
http://www.commonapp.org/