



Partner Project

As a part of the Spring 2016 Startup Institute cohort, I had the pleasure of working with 3 of my fellow students to help one of Startup Institute's partners research, brainstorm, and prototype a new product concept. The project lasted 6 weeks total.

The company that we were partnered with enables prospective college students to physically meet and engage with current students and admissions officers. Institutions purchase a SaaS license to seamlessly engage with prospective students and gain actionable data for the students visiting their campus.

Problem

How can we streamline the process for prospective undergraduate students to meet one on one with current undergraduate students in person?

Research

We interviewed 135 current undergraduate students to determine:

- Whether or not they have met one on one with prospective undergraduate students and what motivated them to have those meetings
- What incentives would encourage current undergraduate students to meet with a large number of prospective students
- Knowledge of existing on-campus organizations that provide this type of opportunity

We interviewed 20 admissions counselors to determine:

- Whether or not they have a system that connects prospective undergraduate students with current undergraduate students and what that process looks like
- What challenges or barriers exist in the admissions office that prevent admissions counselors from providing this type of opportunity to all prospective students

Key Findings

CURRENT STUDENT FINDINGS

- The majority of current undergraduate students said that they would be willing to meet with prospective students.
- The biggest barrier current students face in meeting with prospective students is never having had the opportunity. When asked to clarify what that lack of opportunity encompassed, students answered that they had never being asked by a student or admissions to meet one on one.
- Of those who had met one on one with prospective students, the vast majority of those interactions came about through a personal connection – a friend from high school etc.
- Current undergraduate students noted that food or monetary rewards would incentivize them to meet repeatedly with prospective students.
- 75% of students interviewed did not know if there were any programs on campus that facilitated one on one meetings with prospective students.

ADMISSION COUNSELOR FINDINGS

- Most admissions counselors reported that they have processes in place to facilitate one on one meetings between prospective and current students. The majority of those process required admissions counselors to act as intermediaries between the current student and the prospective student.
- Admissions counselors reported that the biggest barriers to providing this kind of opportunity to all prospective students was the sheer volume of interest from prospective students and the lack of participation from the current students. They also reported that being responsible for coordinating the meeting prevented them from being about to schedule a high volume of requests due to time constraints.

Hypothesis

If we were to create a way in which prospective students could coordinate directly with the current students, then we could meet the desires of prospective students, involve current students who have never been asked to meet, and eliminate the bottleneck for admissions counselors.

Our solution is a mobile application for current undergraduate students that connects them to prospective students and rewards them for their participation in these meetings.

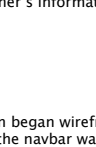
Solution

PRODUCT BASICS

Our product has two main parts: the mobile application designed for current students and the web application designed for prospective students. It is through the seamless interaction between these two apps that current students and prospective students coordinate their meetings.



Current students input their availability into the mobile app. This syncs to the web app.



Prospective students see which students are available and send requests to meet through web app.



Current students see and accept meeting request through mobile app. Prospective student is notified via email and text.

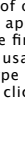
Why a mobile and a web app?

MOBILE APP



- We want current students to quickly and easily schedule meetings with multiple prospective students. 100% of the current students we spoke with used smartphones and had their smartphones with them during the interview. Because we are designing an app requires repeated use to be successful, having the current students interact with the app on a device that is generally always with them can help to increase repeated use.

WEB APP

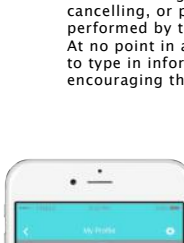


- We want the process of scheduling a meeting with a current student to be as quick and easy as possible for the prospective student. Prospective students are already scheduling tours through the university's online admissions page. Requiring the prospective student to download a mobile app and then schedule a meeting through the app would add extraneous steps to their campus visit scheduling process.

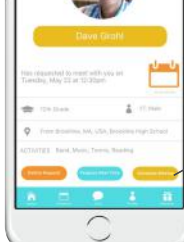
What was our Process?



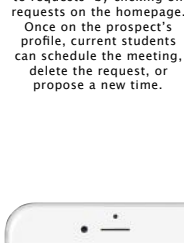
Once we had collected and analyzed all of the data, we began brainstorming solutions. We broke down our findings and assumptions into three buckets: current students, prospective students, and admissions counselors. We identified the pain point for each group and came up with multiple solutions to these problems. We chose the mobile app solution. Due to time constraints we could only prototype the mobile app.



To begin the prototyping process, we wrote the features and capabilities of the mobile app on post-it notes and put these post it notes up on a white board. We eliminated all features that we did not believe were a part of the MVP. We then sorted the remaining features in a way that made sense to us; we found common threads in each other's information hierarchy and debated extraneous areas.



We then began wireframing the app. We decided on where the navbar was going to be, what the call to action on the homepage of the application would be, and the general layout of the application. Our decisions were informed by the card sorting exercise we had briefly done in the step before as well as our desire to optimize the app for scheduling meetings.



To help organize the user flow, we quickly created a journey map. In this journey map, we determined the way in which users would move through each step of the scheduling process and we thought about how users would feel in each step. We optimized the app for easy use to eliminate the any possible frustration that we could foresee if the scheduling process were overly complicated.



We then began creating mockups of our application in Sketch. We decided to keep the app interface simple, clean, and bright. After we finished creating the mockups in Sketch, we added usability in Invisionapp. The clickable prototype should have opened up in a new tab when you clicked on this case study.

Mockups

Due to the time constraints of this project, we chose to prototype only the mobile app.

The goal of the mobile application is to have current students quickly and easily schedule and manage their meetings with prospective students. The app is designed to optimize this process in the following ways:

1 Features on the homePage

The homepage (to the left) is the first screen users see when going into the app. The majority of features on the homepage encourage current students to schedule meetings with prospective students either by adding their availability to their calendar or responding to outstanding requests.

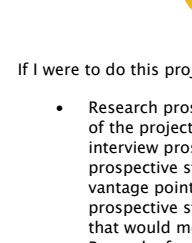
This button takes the user to their calendar. By making this a prominent call to action on the homepage, we can encourage users to add more availability which in turn leads to more meetings.

In the "Requests" section of the homepage, students can quickly and easily view and respond to requests by simply clicking on the cards.

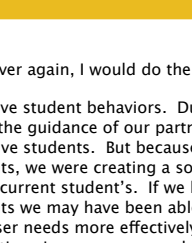
In the "Visiting this Week" section, users are encouraged to sign up to be backups for students who have already scheduled visits this week. This is to ensure that even if a current student has to cancel last minute, another student can be on stand-by for that meeting.

2 Quick and easy scheduling

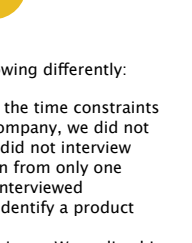
The scheduling process is fast and easy – scheduling, cancelling, or proposing a new time for a meeting can be performed by the user simply by clicking a series of buttons. At no point in any of these processes is the student required to type in information. This streamlines the process – encouraging the student to schedule multiple meetings.



Current students click on requests by clicking on requests on the homepage. Once on the prospect's profile, current students can schedule the meeting, delete the request, or propose a new time.



When a student clicks schedule they will be asked to confirm that they would like to schedule the meeting.



Once a student clicks confirm, they have scheduled the meetings. The current student will be reminded of the meeting via push notifications.

3 Rewards System

We want to encourage current students to attend their meetings and schedule meetings with multiple prospective students. Based upon the data, most current students reported that they would need to have an incentive to meet multiple times with prospective students. To increase the stickiness of the app, we have included an incentive structure. Users earn points for adding their availability to the schedule, meeting with a prospective student, and chatting with a prospective student.

This is the main rewards page. Users can see how many points they have accrued as well as all past transactions that have earned them points and all past point redemptions. Upon clicking redeem your points, users are brought to the screen below.

Users can only redeem points once they have accrued a certain amount of points. This means that for students to get any value out of the application, they must meet with multiple students.

Most students reported that they would meet with prospective students repeatedly if they were incentivized with money or food. In this first iteration of the app, points can be redeemed for money. Students can redeem their points by selecting the amount of points they would like to redeem or the dollar amount they would like to redeem.

4 Notifications & Reminders

Not only do we want the app to remind the meeting easy, we want the entire process from scheduling the meeting to the completion of the meeting to be easy. To ensure that the entire user experience from coordinating the meeting to after the meeting is seamless, the application will remind the current student about upcoming meetings through push notifications.

Next Steps

If we were to continue the project, I would suggest that our team do the following:

- User test the current prototype to identify areas of improvement
- Create a landing page advertising this product to current students. Then with the help of a partner university, launch the landing page to gauge interest of current students.
- Interview prospective students surrounding their college research process to garner insights into their habits & behaviors.
- Interview admissions counselors to get a better understanding of the cost of acquiring students to adjust the rewards system accordingly.

Reflection

If I were to do this project over again, I would do the following differently:

- Research prospective student behaviors. Due to the time constraints of the project and the guidance of our partner company, we did not interview prospective students. But because we did not interview prospective students, we were creating a solution from only one vantage point: the current student's. If we had interviewed prospective students we may have been able to identify a product that would meet user needs more effectively.
- Reword a few questions in our surveys and interviews. We realized in our data analysis phase that there were a few questions that students may have interpreted in a variety of ways. I would make these questions more specific to ensure that the answer we were getting was the answer to the question we meant to ask.
- Involve users in the card sorting exercise. Due to time constraints, our team organized the features in the way that made sense to us. However, we are not the users. Involving users in the card sorting exercise would have given us an unbiased view of how the app should be organized.
- Tweak the visual design. When we showed the clickable prototype to a few members in the Startup Institute cohort, they clicked on names that were not buttons. That was a design issue on our part – we had buttons in the prototype on some screens that looked exactly like decorative headings that were not buttons on other screens.