

CalCentral Engaging Users Project

Gold! Team

Aneesa Chishti | Cameron Lopez | Michael Gutensohn



Motivation



- **Client:** CalCentral
- There are lots of features available on CalCentral that go unnoticed by students due to lack of available information channels
- CalCentral doesn't have a good way to get feedback from students

Goals

- Increasing student engagement with the system as a whole.
 - Engagement as defined by CalCentral: The broadcasting of information to, and the receiving of input from a wide variety of students.
- To find better ways to reach students regarding information about how to use CalCentral in a variety of different situations.
- Help CalCentral to establish a better research framework to utilize in future projects relating to similar questions.



Research Questions

- How can working with an advisory body help or hinder design efforts?
- Are there better ways to reach students?
- How can we provide better info to students about how to use CalCentral?

& Assumptions

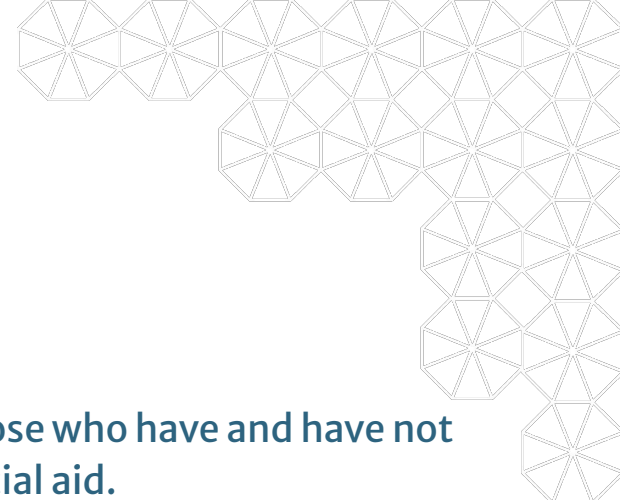
- A majority of students use CalCentral mainly at the beginning of the semester, while those with financial aid use it more consistently.
- Many students get information through other mediums outside of CalCentral, such as Slack, in-person, and email.

Research Methods



- **Diary study** – relating to specific tasks on CalCentral or relating to how students gather information from other channels. Especially relevant considering the variety of ways students will be forced to receive info now that classes are canceled.
- **~~In-person~~ Zoom interviews** – gathering more in-depth data on how students collect university-related information from various channels.
- **Contextual inquiry** – have students walk us through how to access certain information without explicitly telling them to use CalCentral.

Recruiting

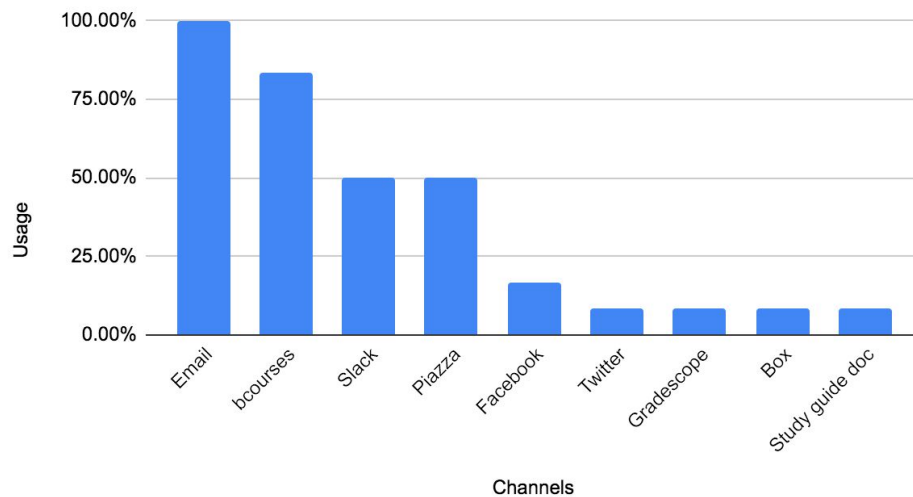


- **User profile:**
 - Even split of those who have and have not accepted financial aid.
 - Graduating seniors (tracking their academic progress/degree completion).
 - First years who are newer to the system
 - Average undergraduate students in the UC system.
 - Average graduate students in the UC system.
- **Screening survey**
 - Sent to students within the School of Information, SACUE, and a large undergraduate introductory cognitive science class.

Diary Studies

#1 Channels?

Usage by Channel



#2 Information needs?



University

(Covid, GSI, Grants/fellowships)



Courses

(Course logistics, Midterm, Grading policy)



Department

(Project collaboration, Department events, Social announcements)

Interviews



Core-questions we asked:

- What platforms are students using for school?
 - Undergrads use general social media (FB, Snap, Reddit, etc.)
 - Graduates prefer focused social media (slack)
 - Both use email, bcourses, Piazza for more “official” purposes
- What are students using CalCentral for?
 - Course enrollment
 - Add/drop
 - Financial aid

Lessons learned:

- CalCentral is seen as an administrative/logistical tool
- both Grads and Undergrads tend to have neutral to anxious feeling when using CalCentral, but attribute this to the rush to enroll or meet deadlines.
- SIP: made scheduling easier, but lost “personal” feeling

Contextual Inquiry

- **Goal:**
 - To understand how students accessed different forms of information and which steps in that process were the most important to them
- Semi-structured
- Had participants walk us through various tasks, such as:
 - Getting a loan.
 - Finding the campus bus schedule.
 - Finding out when an upcoming assignment is due.
 - Planning out their classes for upcoming semesters.
 - Finding out if they're on track to graduate.



Most commonly used platforms:

- Google
- bCourses Dashboard
- CalCentral
- Piazza
- Facebook
- Golden Bear Orientation
- Emails from professors
- Official academic guide
- Major requirement pages within major departments



Conclusions



- Users see CalCentral as an administrative/logistical tool, only “engaging” when they need to perform a certain task.
- There are a few key sites that students use to perform specific tasks and get specific information. CalCentral can utilize these sites to increase student engagement with their platform.
- Working with SACUE ultimately did not have a large impact on our research – many who were interested in working with us did not end up agreeing to participate, so it may have actually hindered research.

Recommendations

- A required crash course on key CalCentral features during orientation.
- Weekly notifications on bcourses dashboard about different CalCentral features, or a link to an informational page about CalCentral functionality.
- Notifications on CalCentral dashboard in few weeks prior to Phase I and II advertising different features.

Recommendations

- Notifications on different majors' Piazza pages or create a CalCentral Piazza page for tips, tricks, and other advice on how to use it.
- Advertise through an informational link sent out by professors of introductory courses at the beginning of the Fall semester.
- Suggest that different departments include a link or suggestion to go to CalCentral's academic progress report on major requirement pages.
- Include a link or suggestion to visit CalCentral's schedule planner and multi-year planner within the official academic guide.

Stephanie Gilmore

Age: 19

Year: Sophomore at UC Berkeley

Major: Intended Data Science/Economics

Financial aid received? No, her parents pay for her schooling.

Goals: Graduate in 4 years, double major in Data Science and Economics.



About Stephanie:

Stephanie is a very schedule-oriented person. An intended Data Science/Economics double major, she has her entire college career planned out by semester on a spreadsheet on her computer. She uses the CalCentral schedule planner, but only for the immediately upcoming semester.

She frequently visits both of her department websites to make sure she is on track to graduate, manually comparing it to her academic summary page on CalCentral. She doesn't really pay attention to all the external links on CalCentral because none of them really stand out to her.

Stephanie uses bCourses pretty much every day to check assignments and due dates. She prefers the list view to the card view because it gives her a list of her important assignments coming up. When she has questions about enrollment issues she usually asks her friends through Facebook messenger. She's considered asking an advisor for help but isn't sure if that's a big enough issue to go to them for.

Rebecca Anderson

Age: 28

Year: Grad student at UC Berkeley

Major: Data Science

Financial aid received? No, she's using her savings.

Goals: Transition from a career in finance to data science in Fintech.



About Rebecca:

Rebecca is extremely passionate about financial markets and wants to use her previous experience to help build financial instruments that are more accessible to people in emerging markets. She is using her time at grad school to build the right skills to conduct deep research.

She has taken many classes outside of her department, and thus needs to juggle with multiple channels – campuswire, piazza, box, gradescope, bcourses, calcentral and many more.

As a GSI in the economics department, she also teaches 50 undergraduate students. She uses calcentral to monitor her degree progress and make sure she's meeting all requirements.

Dave Chen

Age: 23

Year: Junior at UC Berkeley

Major: Biology

Financial aid received? Scholarships

Goals: Transition to a graduate program at a university he has yet to determine



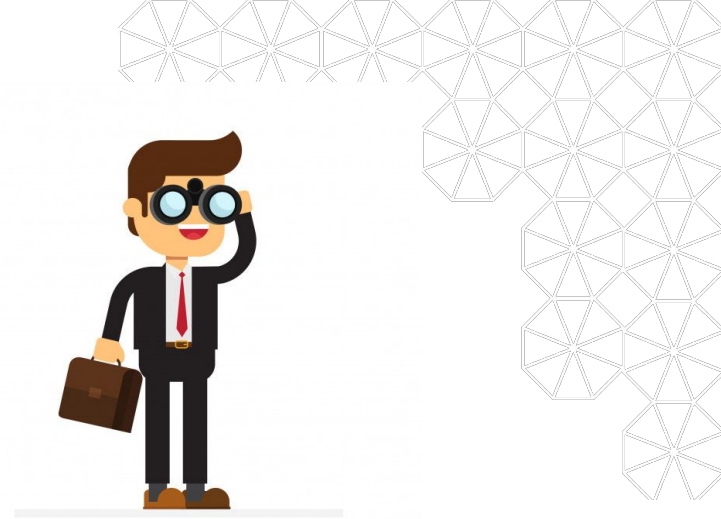
About Dave:

Dave is prolific reader and note taker. He is very passionate about the scientific process and spends much of his time reading the latest academic publications, staying up to date on his field of study. As he enters his final year of his degree, he has begun applying for PhD programs both in and outside the the US.

Dave uses slack to communicate with those in his lab, but relies on bCourses and email for most assignment and course related information.

As a rising senior interested in furthering his education, he uses CalCentral to coordinate his course schedule, monitor his degree requirements, and access his transcripts. He recently found out through his Biology major's Piazza page that he can see his academic progress report on CalCentral, which he has found very useful in ensuring he is on track to graduate.

Future Guidance



- Unclear whether working with student advisory bodies has a significant impact on research.
- Follow-up surveys will reveal more about the future of diary studies.
- We have developed several personas to aid in future design decisions.
- Had reasonable success with recruiting for interviews and contextual inquiries and gained a lot of valuable information from these.

What We Learned

- It's significantly harder to get daily participation on diary studies in the midst of a world-wide pandemic.
- It's hard to control the quality of diary entries – persistent reminders increased participation, but significantly decreased content quality.
- Pilot runs are important
- While easier to schedule, remote interviews lack the same fidelity as in person interviews.



Questions?