Milestone 1: H.C.I.

Hacking Common Issues, Group 9
CSCI 4800 Fall 2014, Plaue, September 15, 2014

For our project Hacking Common Issues (H.C.I.) is looking to take on the issue of transfer students. Transfer students are a large base of students at universities across the nation that may not be as prepared, connected or successful as their concurrent peers in the new institution. A good bit of this stems from the lack of attention they receive upon transferring compared to first year admits. We look to resolve this by aiding the transfer experience and making it more seamless for these students.

First, we must know the stakeholders in this problem as they are integral to finding a solution. The directly affected groups are the primary priority. They include all transfer students, incoming and outgoing, that are graduate, undergraduate, and alumni that transferred. Transfer counselors and administrators (Office of Admissions) are also included as they deal directly with the issues of helping students transfer. The secondary group includes professors and lecturers who deal with transfer students issues after the act of transferring is complete. Finally, the tertiary group is IT administrators in the school who could be affected in helping us implement our solution.

Focusing on the first group, we took interviews of 20 transfers and two administrative staff who work with them. From our findings, it was agreed that transferring could be made into a better process. The overarching tasks the students wished to perform included help with deadlines and removing the anxiety of not knowing what credits will transfer. A few students even requested that the transfer counselors/schools communicate with each other.

Currently, these transfer students must navigate web sites, counselors, phone calls, and phone applications to complete their objective. We reviewed four different colleges transfer web sites, UGA, Georgia Tech, Penn State, and Cal Tech. We found that while some are easier than others, links to transfer information are difficult locate and information about transferring is not always readily apparent. All the sites but Cal Tech's have credit transfer help. Georgia Tech and Penn State allow you to do a 'narrow down' search to find

equivalency for a specific course. UGA gives an equivalency sheet that must be self-searched through. Students can also initiate transfers through counselors who hands-on help them through paperwork and transfer equivalencies. The students also make phone calls to the institution they are transferring to when information is inadequate on the transfer website or from their local counselor. Next, an app already out on Google Play called "Transfer Student Elixir" by SonicWorkflow claims to help students with the transfer process by providing them with transfer equivalency and mathematical tools to calculate transferring credits between any institution. It is a sparse app with unusual navigation techniques. These current methods can be slow and tedious. The lack of standards on how transfers should work between schools also hampers prospective transferees which ands anxiety and stress to their lives. We would like to work to fix this problem.

In order to aid the transfer process the system we are developing should include the following functionalities. The first category of functionality is ease of access for information. This has been shown by the difficulty of navigating the websites and the interviewed students requesting easier to access data about transferring. This category is deadlines for testing and form requirements and transfer equivalency. The former could be handled by a compiled, interactive calendar of all deadlines for schools supported. The latter could be helped by including an interactive database to let students compare courses between multiple universities and allow transfer administrators and counselors to do the same. In addition to the database, with professor's permission, space on a website should be added to allow for the upload of common transferred courses syllabi. This will allow the comparison of courses that may not be in the database and give counselors and students the ability to align similar classes to take or have credit transfer. This part is to help students who requested more communication between schools. Functionalities that are already implemented including transfer equivalency charts, search tools, etc. on University websites could be re-implemented in a properly designed web environment.

The second category is the integration of transfer students into their new institution. In Student-Faculty Relationships and Intellectual Growth among Transfer Students by Volkwein, King, and Terenzini, they looked at 400 transfers. They found transfer students who interact with concerned faculty are more likely

to experience intellectual growth and knowledge retention. Something that their and previous studies found was not as prominent among non-transfer populations. However, students at or from four year colleges appeared to be less in need of this interaction. (Volkwein, King, Terenzini) This suggests functionality in our system that would allow for transfer students to become more aware of their department's activities that could get them involved with passionate professors in their majors. Another study, The Effect of Academic Factors on Transfer Student Persistence and Graduation: A Community College to Liberal arts College Case Study by Cejda, Rewey and Kaylor finds that transfers, particularly those from community colleges tend to have transfer "shock" where their GPAs drop after transferring. According to the study, this drop is more apparent when the individual transfers while taking lower-level classes vs. upper level. When combining this study with the previous, it becomes readily apparent that professor involvement with these students can alleviate their disadvantage from transferring.

From the data we have received the best solution for our users would be a website they can access from both normal and mobile browsers. This website should have a database that amalgamates all the data from schools around the United States and the world to meet the functionality requirements from the categories above.

Once we implement a solution, we hope to make an impact on the transfer students lives. We will judge whether or not we have by testing a prototype our system on current students and faculty in the transfer process and receive constructive feedback. We will also ask questions to transfers and counselors about our ideas for the system to see if they have any more recommendations. Another metric that will be used is tracking usage statistics to see if our solution is actually popular and working. If the feedback we receive is constructive, we will modify our functionality to better meet the needs of the users; else we will continue to support the transfer community the best we can.

Select Walkthroughs:

UGA Transfer Website:

When visiting the website www.uga.edu and attempting to navigate the main page searching for information about transferring in to this institution there is nothing that stands out. The next option is to type "Transfer" in the provided search bar this brings up a page of links with several pages related to the information I was looking for.

When I select the first link "Transfer Students" it takes me to a page welcoming prospective transfers with a variety of links pointing to pages that tout the University's merits of academic excellence as well as the campus and surrounding town. On the side bar are several links displaying phrases such as "Why UGA?" and "Recruit Me" to "UGA en Español" and "Veterans Information". Included in these sidebar links is one pointing to "Transfer Equivalency" linking to the same page as the. Located towards the bottom of the page there are other links pointing to information about admission criteria and deadlines, frequently asked questions, the incoming transfer statistics, tuition and scholarship information, and housing. The link for admission criteria takes a prospective student to the same page that clicking the second link "Transfer Application Requirements" from search page would.

Upon further exploration of the home page the link to "Admissions" will pull down a box detailing the various types of students and further navigating to "Undergraduate Admissions" will send you to an admissions page. This page contains a large box with cycling images that draw your attention and at the top are links for various types of people that may be visiting this site, among these is one labelled "Transfer Students", clicking this link changes the left side of the box in this box is a link leading to the page that can be accessed through the first link of search results.

Georgia Tech Transfer Website:

When visiting the website www.gatech.edu and attempting to navigate the main page searching for information there is the same problem with UGA's website the information is not found easily but can be located with some searching. A search of "Transfer" using the provided field returns with several links, at the very top highlighted with yellow is a link to the "Undergraduate Admission :: Transfer". Selecting this link brings you to a page detailing in plain language what types of students should be applying as a transfer to Georgia Tech as well as a prominent table with deadlines.

The sidebar of the page contains links to pages detailing the Selection Process, Application Process, Credit Information, FAQ, and Partnership Programs.

Navigation of the home page of Georgia Tech's website is very similar to UGA's, when mousing over "Admissions" it pulls down a list of links to other pages. When selecting "Undergraduate Admissions" from this list brings you to Tech's undergraduate admissions page, the sidebar on this page is easily recognizable due to the black on white coloring and the large cycling image box right next to it. Unlike UGA there is no prominent link to transfer student information, someone looking for it must click on the "Apply" link in the sidebar or notice at the bottom of the page in small text "Transfer" under "Apply". When you click on the sidebar link it opens a page detailing the types of applications and explaining in plain language what each entails.

Student Transfer Elixir:

The app is installed through Google Play. It launches fast and includes an ad on the bottom. It has four bubbles of varying size that are purple on a lime green fading background. Clicking on the largest bubble equivalency list brings you to an empty page that asks the user to "Press the MENU button to add an equivalency" It is not apparent at first what menu button they are speaking of as it is missing the three bar standard in the top bar for a menu. Once the phone's physical menu button has been clicked, an option appears on top of the ad to 'add'. Clicking add takes you to a form where you fill out your school, the course you would like to transfer and the same for the school being transferred to. When done, this simply adds an item to a list of course transfers. The state list bubble allows you to select your school which then brings you to that school's transfer page in a browser. The analytics bubble allows you to view a graphical representation of your transfer list. Finally, The Email bubble allows you to contact what appears to be a person from Sonic Workflow to help you with your transfer needs.

References:

Google Play: Sonic Workflow – Transfer Student Elixir

Student-Faculty Relationships and Intellectual Growth among Transfer Students
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