One of the most worrying trends in the US higher education system is the fact that only 59% of the students who seek a bachelor’s degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution, graduate. The stats are even worse when California is accounted for, with only 33% graduating. California State University, Los Angeles, one of the prime education institution located in the city of Los Angeles has a diminutive graduation rate, with only 8.5% graduating within four years. This astonishing figure proves that the internal education infrastructure of the institution required introspection and thus Blitz Consultants was tasked with designing a web portal, where students would be guided by field experts and counsellors would help individuals seeking counselling for both academic and personal issues.

The ulterior aim of the web portal was to increase the graduation rate of the college without overhauling the whole education system and at an affordable cost. Thus, the idea of an online web portal was conceived. This portal would not only guide the students through their academic career but also make them understand the industry standards and needs.

To decide on how to design the prototype system, the design team first gathered student information from the University’s student portal called Moodle. Among the data researched were student attendance, class schedule, class participation, student performance and individual course curriculum. After further consideration, the team decided to link the prototype with Moodle at the back-end, thus eliminating the chances of student data recovery malfunction. The team then handed out a blueprint of the prototype to a team of developers who were entrusted with the task of developing the prototype. In the meantime, another team was tasked to rope in several industry experts who would enlighten the students of the current needs and standards of the industry. A team of academic mentors were hired who would monitor student grades in freshman and sophomore years and predict the likely drop-outs. Professional counsellors were also contacted who would cater to the academic as well as personal issues of the students.

The proof of concept created consists of a multifunctional web portal with provisions for online counselling as well. A separate segment consists of appointment scheduling where students can book an appointment with industry experts. Each student would be required to sign in with their unique college identification number, thus maintaining a profile where he or she would receive individual guidance. A link is provided for 24/7 online counselling, which if clicked would redirect the individual to a virtual chat room where a professional counsellor would be available to conduct one-to-one counselling session. The provision for 24/7 online counselling provides students to seek professional help in cases of emergencies during wee hours of the day. One of the salient feature of the virtual chat room includes hiding the identity of the student, where the student would receive anonymous counselling if he or she is not comfortable divulging identity. It is often seen that students refrain from seeking professional help just because they are too scared or too shy to open-up in front of counsellors. Hiding their identity would address that concern.

The prototype is to be extensively tested for any glitches and ensure that it satisfies all the needs of students. Testing would be completed by subject matter experts who will then certify that the web portal met each requirement. The testing will be based on observations and will use preapproved checklists to track how well requirements were met. Components to be tested includes ease of access, page navigation, reliability, data accessibility and functionality.

It is certain that full-scale implementation of the web portal would lead to improved academic performance among students and consequently increase the graduation rate. In addition to immediate implementation of the web portal by California State University, Los Angeles, Blitz consultants recommends the university to start awarding more number of scholarships so as to encourage more students to achieve academic excellence.