Improving UX in UCF's Student Portal to Reduce Academic Advising Requests

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Background

User experience (UX) design affects how easily and efficiently people can use digital systems. Poor design forces users to rely on external help rather than completing tasks independently (Norman, 2013).

In higher education, user portals contain the tools students depend on to find and register for classes, manage financial aid and account payments, and track their progress towards graduation. However, many portals, including the one at the University of Central Florida, can be difficult to use and not very intuitive. Often, this happens because they are built on legacy platforms that "can no longer support modern interfaces and new ways of doing business" (Brooks & Pomerantz, 2019).

As someone interested in UX/UI design, I have noticed how much interface design can impact how users interact with a system. From personal experience, I know that the student portal and schedule builder can feel confusing and require more steps than necessary to complete basic tasks.

Because of this, students often turn to academic advisors for help with simple tasks like finding classes or building a schedule. While advisors are there to help, this creates extra work that could potentially be reduced if the system were easier to use and more students could complete the simple actions on their own. Improving the user experience of these tools could help students become more independent while also reducing some of the workload placed on advisors.

This project will evaluate the usability of UCF's student portal and schedule builder and test whether simple UX/UI improvements would benefit both students and the administration.

Methodology

This study will use usability testing to compare how students interact with the current system versus a redesigned version. I will recruit 12 UCF students by obtaining permission and posting flyers in Trevor Colbourn Hall (TCH) and asking the Integrative Studies advising team to email the opportunity to all students in the school. Students will be offered a $20 Cane's gift card in exchange for their time.

The participant group of 12 students is large enough to identify common issues while still being manageable within the scope of the project. Testing will be conducted on campus in a quiet location with Internet access.

Using a laptop computer and standard web browser, participants will be asked to log into www.myucf.edu and complete the following common tasks:

- Find 5 specific classes for summer using the Schedule Builder
- Generate class schedule for summer
- Import schedule to their enrollment shopping cart
- Complete enrollment
- View and edit their Pegasus Path
- View their Knight Audit

I will record the following data in an Excel spreadsheet during each task:

- Time it takes participant to successfully complete the task
- Number of mistakes the participant makes before finding the correct information
- Specific pages or areas where participants get confused or hesitate
- Any specific pages or areas where the user feels like they cannot find the correct information and cannot proceed without outside help
- If the task is able to be successfully completed (yes or no)
- Participant rating (1-5) on how easy (5) or difficult (1) it was to complete the task

After the initial testing, results will be analyzed to identify the most common usability issues. Based on these findings, improved interface designs will be created using

Figma. These designs will focus on making navigation clearer, reducing unnecessary steps, and making these tasks more efficient and faster to complete.

During the second round of testing, participants will complete the same tasks using a clickable prototype of the redesigned interface. An identical set of data will be recorded. The results from both rounds will be compared to see if the changes improved efficiency, clarity, the need for external help, and success in completing the tasks.

Anticipated Outcomes

It is expected that the redesigned interface will:

- Reduce the time needed to complete most tasks
- Decrease the number of times the user navigates to the wrong place initially because the correct place is not easy to find
- Make navigation feel more straightforward, and improve overall user confidence
- Improve the number of tasks the user is able to complete successfully
- Decrease the need for external help

These results would suggest that even small UX/UI improvements can make a noticeable difference in how students interact with the system and how that translates to questions for their advisors. Results will be compiled and presented at the student research showcase in spring of 2027.

Significance

This project is important because it focuses on a real problem that affects many students every time they register, as well as year-round for general planning or looking up routine information. An improved user experience would enable students to complete more tasks on their own and reduce emails, calls, and meetings with their advisor for tasks that should be able to be completed independently in the portal. This could reduce the number of routine questions that academic advisors receive, increasing their availability to help students with more complex concerns.

Intended Audience

The primary audience for this project is students who regularly use the student portal and schedule builder, since they are the most directly affected by how easy or difficult the system is to use. University administrators and academic advising departments are also an important audience, as they are responsible for managing these systems and supporting students in using them.

Project Benefits

This project will benefit students by making it easier to complete important tasks like finding classes and registering for courses. A more user-friendly system can reduce confusion, save time, and allow students to handle these tasks on their own successfully. As a result, students may rely less on academic advisors for simple tasks that should be easy to complete on their own. This could help reduce the overall workload for advisors and allow them to focus on more complex student needs.

References

Norman, D. A. (2013). *The design of everyday things*. MIT Press.

Brooks, D. C., & Pomerantz, J. (2019). *New life for legacy systems.* EDUCAUSE Review. https://er.educause.edu/articles/2019/8/new-life-for-legacy-systems.

Timeline

This project will be completed over the course of one semester beginning in January 2027. This span of time will be sufficient to complete both rounds of testing, and the timing aligns with the enrollment dates for both summer and fall semesters.

Dates	Tasks
January 1, 2027-January 20, 2027	Define research scope; review best practices on UX and usability
January 21, 2027-February 10, 2027	Design testing plan; outline testing process

February 11, 2027-February 28, 2027	Recruit participants; prepare final testing materials
March 1, 2027-March 20, 2027	Conduct initial usability testing (pre-registration period)
March 21, 2027-April 10, 2027	Analyze results; identify usability issues; create redesigned interface prototype
April 11, 2027-April 20, 2027	Conduct second round of testing
April 21, 2027-April 30, 2027	Compare results; finalize findings
May 1, 2027-October 1, 2027	Prepare research report and presentation materials
March 2028 (dates TBD)	Present findings at Student Research Showcase

Budget

Item	Units and Cost	Total
Tester incentives ($20 Cane's gift card per participant)	$20/person, 12 people	$240
Poster printing through SGA	No cost	$0
Total	-	**$240**