

CSUN gives students easy-to-use, personalized experience with new Modo-powered web portal



CASE STUDY

California State University,
Northridge

INDUSTRY

Higher Education

Since 1958 California State University, Northridge (CSUN) has been committed to enabling human potential through the transformative power of higher education. Serving 38,500 students on a 353-acre campus, the University has been a Modo customer for over a decade, launching its Modo-powered CSUN mobile app in 2012.

In October 2021, the CSUN IT team learned that a required system-wide upgrade planned for the following fall would render their current Student Information and Human Resources systems incompatible with the campus desktop portal. As a result, they would need to plan, design, build, and launch a new, modern portal that students would use in just eight months.

“If we had been on our own timeline, we would have allocated two years to this project,” said CSUN IT Director of Enterprise Application Development Kyle Shaver. “We knew we wouldn’t be able to launch with every feature, so prioritization was critical.”

“We are thrilled with the result. We left the old portal up at launch, and 75% of students chose to stay with the new one. We weren’t expecting more than 30%. It’s a real testament to the decisions we made that we were able to create a portal truly useful to students.”

Kyle Shaver, Director, Enterprise Application Development
California State University, Northridge Information Technology

Cross-functional team broadens input, streamlines decision-making

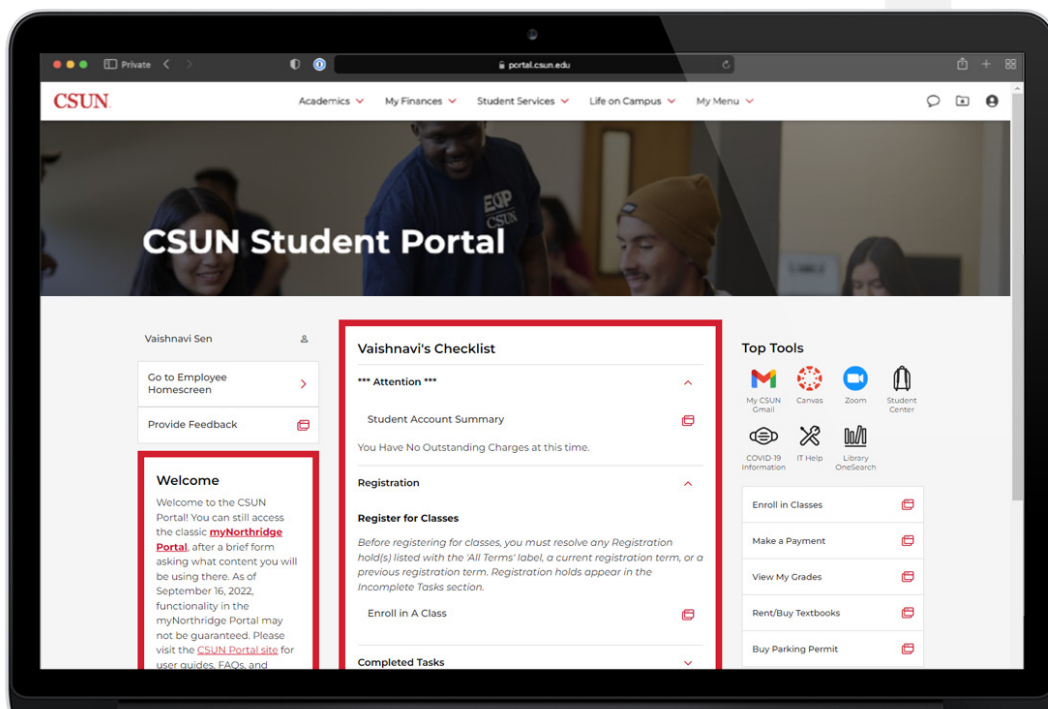
CSUN Chief Information Officer Ranjit 'Ron' Phillip and his team began by getting buy-in from the University executive cabinet to identify campus representatives to join a 16-person Portal Implementation Team. It included Associate VPs, Staff, Department Chairs, Faculty, and Student representatives. Shaver and his team conducted broad focus groups to identify needed and desired portal features. He then presented a plan to the Portal Implementation Team to review.

Focus group input showed that students wanted personalization and customization in the portal. In contrast, the IT team's technology requirements focused on extensibility and the ability to develop tools for the platform easily. As the CSUN team reviewed RFP responses and platform vendor demos, they found Modo's X-Module approach a far more flexible, individualized process than the SDKs other vendors offered.

Modo's modular design also resonated with the CSUN team. "The aesthetic looked really good," said Shaver. "The modularity of it comes from Modo being a mobile-first design. There are columns, content, and categories. Modules go on a page instead of full screens. That translated into a great interface. Modo also showed us possibilities, like adding a 'progress to graduation' element and other items that would be easy for us to spin up. It showed the attention to detail of what a university portal should look like."

Given the project's focus on personalization, Modo's ability to neatly display students' profile photo, name, and email, recognize who each individual is, and deliver content based on that, was exactly what students were looking for.

"The ability to simplify and still have content available – behind additional landing pages but out of the way – was a huge improvement over a list of functionality running down the side. Modo's platform is neatly compartmentalized. We saw immediately that it would be easy to implement, but also that the sky was the limit with functionality for the future."



Staying nimble to launch quickly

Once Modo Campus was chosen as the new portal's infrastructure, the Modo team connected with Carnegie, a firm engaged in updating the CSUN website, and invited to the new portal's discovery, ideation, and design process. The CSUN team prioritized feature development to make the 8-month launch timing.

"The 80/20 rule became our mantra," Shaver explained. "We determined that 80% of portal traffic was going through 20% of the links. That 80% of issues were coming from 20% of the content. We put attention where it needed to be, and it was wonderful to have the full support of our CIO, Ron, behind that approach."

Shaver and his team worked with constituent groups throughout the project – always providing data to back up recommended decisions. When none was available, "restraint was important." The Portal Implementation Team also forged a Portal Strike Team of six, authorized to make fast decisions on behalf of the full team and pivot as necessary to the project's needs. "A lot of great things came out of dynamically changing our governance during the project," Shaver noted.

Students embrace the new portal

When launch day arrived for the new CSUN Portal just before the start of the Fall 2022 semester, the IT team kept the old MyNorthridge portal online so students could opt for either. "Anytime you change an integral system, you have to be prepared for negativity. We braced for an impact that never came. 75% of students chose to stay with the new portal, given the option. We weren't expecting that – we thought 30% retention would have been great!"

Shaver credits the robust, flexible Modo platform for enabling an on-time launch. At one point completing what may have been a 2-month project in a weekend, using the tools Modo provided.

"This project was a really nice, buttoned-up success story," said Shaver. "We're incredibly happy, and we're set up for the future. That's everything."

Looking ahead: Canvas integration and more personalization

With the new CSUN Portal successfully launched, Shaver and his team are considering integrating the Canvas financial aid calculator directly in the portal. They also plan to add a 'progress to graduation' element specific to each student in the portal UI, use push notifications to promote food and housing insecurity programs, and enable checklist features for students and staff.

Through its campus app and portal, CSUN can give its students seamless access to campus systems, helpful tools, and exciting features by leveraging Modo's many integration opportunities. Hundreds of productized integrations and native SDKs are available, including student information and learning management systems like PeopleSoft, Banner, and Canvas; wayfinding tools like MapsPeople and Aruba; Tacit mobile food ordering; HID digital access; mobile credentialing on Apple Wallet and Android devices; Mainstay chatbot; and much more.

Visit modolabs.com/modo-campus-app/ to learn more, access Starter Kits and resources, or get a demo.

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