MODO.

Penn State University uses Modo platform to provide streamlined student experience across mobile and desktop

CASE STUDY

Penn State University

INDUSTRY

Higher Education

Founded in 1855, Pennsylvania State University is a top-ranked research university serving over 72,500 students across 24 campuses and an online World Campus.

In 2010, Penn State's undergraduate student government body – University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA) – approached the IT department for an all-in-one mobile app. Students were tired of visiting multiple places to access core resources like Canvas, PeopleSoft, and email. Plus, the student government body wanted to improve communications with students.

"One of the biggest problems in higher ed is communicating with students – they don't want to read lots of emails. With nearly all students using mobile devices, they expect a personalized experience in their interactions with us. We knew a mobile app would satisfy many needs and fill many gaps," explains Jen Stedelin, Associate Vice President, Enterprise Systems and Services, at Penn State University.

Simultaneously, another group at Penn State was strategizing about creating a one-shop web portal experience because the school's leadership felt students needed a single place for school-related communications and transactions. Knowing **students wanted a unified experience and similar experience to mobile**, Penn State IT spearheaded a University-wide initiative involving various units and departments to collaborate on creating a streamlined student experience.

"We chose the Modo Campus app-building platform for its agility and the way it empowers us to meet the immediate and future needs and interests of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and others. We are excited by all the untapped potential."

Jen Stedelin, Associate Vice President
Enterprise Systems and Services, Penn State University

Collaborating to Deliver One University

Penn State IT established a mobile team to engage major stakeholders across Penn State for input on the ideal mobile app experience. In addition to securing leadership sponsors, the team surveyed over 3,500 undergraduate and graduate students to understand what they were looking for in an app.

Discussions with UPUA, students, and other groups provided insight into the essential features to ensure the app's success. The result was the top features for the mobile app: Canvas, LionPATH (Penn State's student information system), Penn State email, academic advising, campus safety, and library services.

Finding a Unified, Personalized Solution with Modo Campus

Penn State had previously used an open-source mobile platform but turned to Modo due to its support for both mobile and desktop. According to Stedelin, the Modo Campus platform was appealing with features such as XModule and support for personas and personalized notifications. The school also appreciated the ability to deliver location-based experiences. "It's important that we can serve different experiences in the app, aligned with each student's interest, location, and campus affiliation," Stedelin continues.

Student input was key to the project's success. Penn State IT invited students to participate in multiple UI/UX reviews, beta testing, and face-to-face testing. The feedback from students helped shape the app's initial features and services and a future roadmap—all to ensure an experience that students want.

Satisfying Digital-First Demands with Penn State Go

Penn State launched a new, all-in-one mobile app, Penn State Go, in January 2020 to provide a single, unified mobile destination to manage university life. The new app delivers single sign-on access to core school and campus features. These include the school's Learning Management System, Canvas, LionPATH, email, and LionCash+, an online, prepaid flexible spending account accessed by the Penn State id+ Card. Students can also track shuttle buses and access campus maps, library services, Starfish academic advising, and more.

Students curate their experience by selecting a persona based on their campus location – the main University Park campus, one of the Commonwealth Campuses, or the online World Campus. They can also stay informed and connected to what is happening at Penn State by opting into channels of interest.

"With our Modo-powered app, we can easily deliver what students need at each campus location, whether they are part of our physical or virtual Penn State experience. Moreover, it's easy for them to switch their experiences. Penn State Go is a significant step in satisfying students' demands for digital-first campus experiences," says Stedelin.
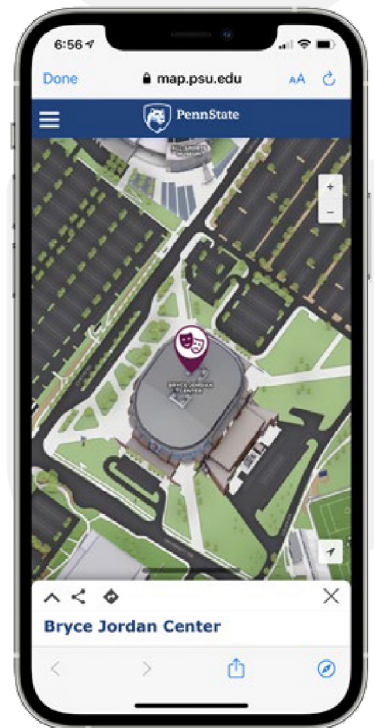
The enhanced Canvas integration brings many features of Canvas directly into Penn State Go. When Penn State Go first launched, Canvas linked to the Canvas Student app. Now, students can seamlessly interact with Canvas without leaving Penn State Go.

After the initial app launch, Penn State developed personas for faculty, staff, parents, and families. Faculty and staff can now receive targeted push notifications and in-app banner messages and access Canvas Teacher and Workday from their mobile devices. Next is an alumni persona to serve the school's alumni network of nearly 700,000.

Expanding Access via the Desktop

World Campus students could log in to a previously launched portal to see courses and information on a desktop. When it became clear that all Penn State students needed a one-stop transactional portal, Penn State IT called upon Modo XModules to ensure personalized access from the start.

The Modo platform enables Penn State to easily, quickly, and cost-efficiently utilize existing integrations to complement its campus mobile app with a desktop portal. Through a desktop version of Penn State Go, students can access information on the web with key links to Penn State resources and services, including LionPATH, Canvas, and Penn State email. Because Penn State didn't have a traditional portal, this initiative helped bring student services and features under one umbrella regardless of platform.
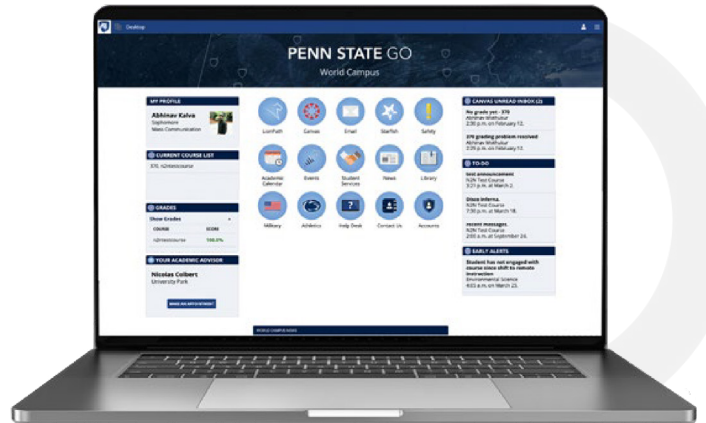
Ensuring Ongoing Success

Since 2020, the Penn State Go mobile app has been downloaded 240,000 times, with 85% of students using the app at least once a week. The app has served over 80 million page views and 25 million user sessions, and 152,000 users have enabled push notifications. But they're not stopping there.

To drive continued success with its mobile and desktop experiences, Penn State IT has established an operations group, mobile app liaisons across campuses, and an advisory committee representing the main groups across campus.

"We have met with over 100 groups who want a presence on the app. The Modo platform empowers us to enable campuses with control over their communications via the app. Delegation abilities help ensure we maintain the agility we need to keep the app fresh," Stedelin continues.

The school looks forward to further exploring all it can do via its mobile app and desktop experiences.

Visit modolabs.com/modo-campus-app/ to learn more about the Modo Campus platform.

AWS services used:
AWS EC2, AWS Lambda, AWS Simple Storage Service (S3), AWS Well-Architected

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