

# Case Study

## Tarrant County College Engages Students with a Mobile App

### Key Takeaways:

- With OU Campus™, colleges and universities can implement a mobile solution before implementing their main site
- A “one size fits all” mobile solution for higher education doesn’t exist; knowing the audience, existing software limitations, and expectations of students and administration are key factors in going mobile
- Building a mobile app requires gathering the right information through extensive research, both in-house and through outside expertise

Tarrant County College (TCC) got its start in 1965 and continues to grow as a comprehensive two-year institution dedicated to providing quality education with programs that cover more than 80 technical and transfer areas. It is the sixth largest institution in Texas with an enrollment of roughly 50,000 students. TCC covers a vast area with five major academic campuses located in three different cities within Tarrant County, and administrative offices in downtown Fort Worth.

### Mobile-Friendly Is a Must

Soon after launching their website in 2009, Tarrant County College students and administration began asking: “Why isn’t the site mobile-friendly?” Not surprising since TCC saw an exponential growth of site visits via mobile devices; a whopping 16% increase from August 2012 to March 2013 (from approximately 9% to 25%). In the 2013 E-Expectations Report published by Noel-Levitz, 68% of college-bound students said they have viewed college websites on a mobile device, so TCC was not alone. TCC’s web team knew if they were to take on a mobile site, they would have to do it quickly. However, their existing web content management system (CMS) could not easily provide a mobile-friendly site, much less make changes on the fly. Due to these limitations, TCC chose to make the switch to OmniUpdate’s CMS, OU Campus. TCC found OU Campus to be the perfect solution since they could implement their mobile site first and their main site at a later time when they were ready and resources were available.

### Limited Options

Tarrant County College considered a few different options for going about a mobile-friendly site: use native apps, design responsively, or build a mobile app. However, only one option would allow TCC’s team to come out on top.

The option to create native apps was less than ideal. It would require building specific source code and updating it each and every time for each and every marketplace out there. That kind of approach would involve a lot of upkeep and support, and with a small web department, TCC would not be able to deliver. So, that option was out.

The team would run into the same problem using responsive design, which utilizes a mobile first approach whereby users can view a site on any device and the content is automatically formatted to the device’s width. Though it was a practical solution, the team didn’t have the time or resources to redesign the entire site using responsive design.

The TCC team felt that a mobile app was what they needed. They discovered that building a mobile app would also bring in a lot of responsive design features, like mobile first, in addition to being adaptive and device independent. It would provide easy access and sharability among students and devices. Moreover, this approach was strongly requested by their chancellor. It had usability and demand, and a way to save time. Building a new mobile site for the app in OU Campus would give them experience with the CMS prior to a full site implementation, plus it would minimize migration time if the app were to include only a concentrated portion of information.



### TCC Mobile Options

1. Native apps
2. Design responsively
3. Mobile app

### Student-Focused Footprint

It was decided that the purpose of Tarrant County College's mobile-friendly web app would be to provide information to its students. Thus, the web team needed to gather the right kind of information for students to use it. TCC consulted a couple different sources and compared the research side by side to figure out what their students most needed in a mobile app.

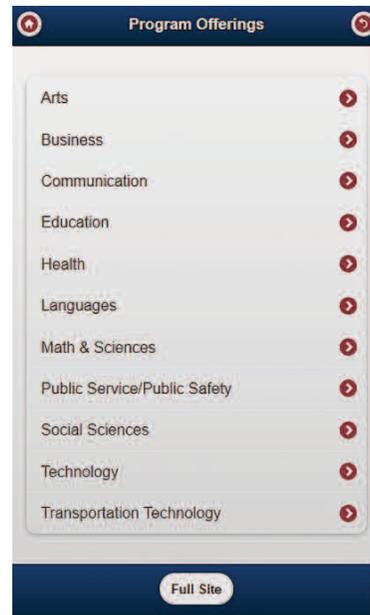
With such a high penetration in the higher education market, OmniUpdate was able to provide insight. OmniUpdate staff supplied TCC with information on what other colleges and universities generally focus on for a well-designed mobile presence, as well as best practices.

The second and most telling source came from analyzing Google Analytics of their main site. The team was able to focus on TCC students' behavior by filtering out parts of their site that were clearly being used by administration. They narrowed the field down to seven major areas that had the most traffic by students:

1. myTCC (WebAdvisor)
2. Calendar
3. Maps
4. Library
5. Courses & Programs
6. Student Services
7. Career Coach

But were students not using the whole site because it wasn't mobile-friendly or because they only needed those major areas on the go? That's where TCC's third source came into play.

The web team asked students directly, in the one place where their mobile users most certainly subsisted: Facebook®. The web team posted the status, "If TCC had a mobile app for current students, what's the one thing you hope it would have?" Fifty-nine "Likes" and 106 comments later, they had confirmation that the seven major areas identified would work nicely for their web app. And through their collaboration with OmniUpdate, they knew that any additional areas requested by students could be incorporated with ease at a later time.



### Opportunities to Grow

The entire process to build and implement Tarrant County College's mobile app took about three months. OmniUpdate developed and delivered the mobile templates in two weeks, and then it was up to TCC to gather and edit content, then get approval from administrators. Once they had the mobile site built in OU Campus, they used Adobe® PhoneGap™ Build to wrap and distribute it as an app. From there, they were able to submit and pass app store requirements for distribution. The mobile app went live in September 2012.

Without OmniUpdate's flexibility throughout the project, the process would have taken a lot longer. "We needed a solution to keep up with the increase in mobile traffic, while creating a more efficient way to manage our content, and OmniUpdate was able to deliver that for us in a timely manner," stated Robert Heyser, Interim Director of Web Communications at TCC.

Since launching the mobile app, TCC has already added an eighth area called "Evaluate Classes" based on student feedback. Usability testing is scheduled for September 2013, which will provide the web team with further data to refine the app if needed.

TCC is now comfortable and familiar with OU Campus and looking forward to a full site migration. With OmniUpdate and OU Campus on their side, they know they'll have more time to focus on web development, design, and content strategy. They most look forward to having content synchronization. With 250 contributors throughout their campuses, they will be able to easily share and update information whether it's on their desktop version or mobile-friendly app.

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