Mobile Application Focus Group

Introduction

The President’s Leadership Institute of 2012 chose, as its leadership project, to develop a mobile map application for students of Pasco-Hernando Community College. In addition to developing this initial application, the 2012 PLI participants also wanted to leave a “blueprint” for future application development at PHCC that would complement, or even provide alternatives, to the original mobile map application. As part of this effort, student focus groups were conducted to determine student interest in mobile applications; the types of mobile application features desirable to the student body; and the types of mobile applications desirable to the student body. This report contains a summary of the focus group sessions conducted on behalf of the PLI of 2012.

Methodology

In December 2011 two separate focus groups were conducted with different sets of student participants. The aim of both groups was to identify approaches to the development of mobile applications for Pasco-Hernando Community College. On December 05, 2011 a group of thirteen students from the drafting and design technology program on West campus participated in the initial focus group. Nearly all of the students in the group had a degree of experience with mobile or computer-based applications. Around half of the students had a mobile device from which they accessed mobile applications. Students with mobile devices were evenly divided between experience with Android and Apple applications. This group was predominately white male, traditional-age college students.

On December 12, 2011 a group of twelve students representing a mix of student government representatives and student workers at the Spring Hill campus participated in a second focus group. Nearly all of the students in this group had a mobile phone from which they accessed mobile applications. Students with mobile phones presently use their phones to access email messages from instructors, Quista Alert, Angel, and WISE. Both male and female students were well represented at this session. Moreover, the group was ethnically diverse. The majority of participants were traditional-age college students.

Summary of Results

- When asked what features were most important students emphasized reliability, user-friendliness, minimal storage requirements, customizability, and a narrowly focused purpose.
- Student opinion varied on the usefulness of a map app for PHCC, tilting towards the majority of students finding value in a map app. This was due in part to the many variations of map apps envisioned by the students participating in the focus groups. All students did see value in a map app that helped students locate nearby restaurants, gas stations, and banks. Interestingly, students felt that a campus map app would allow existing students to better communicate to new students where buildings, etc. are located on campus.
- All students expressed an interest in a mobile application that was akin to MyPHCC.
• The group of students from Spring Hill campus was very interested in a multi-functioning calendar application.

Conclusion

Students participating in the mobile application focus groups indicated a strong interest in mobile applications for Pasco-Hernando Community College. Students mentioned that they expect a PHCC application to be reliable, customizable, and narrowly focused on performing a specific task.

Students provided mixed reviews when asked about a campus map application. Some students felt that a campus map application would only be relevant to new students; however, other students felt that campus map apps would be helpful for existing students taking classes at multiple campuses and for existing students helping new students navigate their way around campus. Overall, nearly all focus group participants were interested in some type of map application, including one that located nearby areas of interest.

Although students were interested in an application that provided information about student activities by and large, they were most interested in an application that would enhance their academic experience. All students participating in the focus groups expressed a desire for an application that would allow functionality similar to MyPHCC.

Another strong theme emerging from the focus groups was an interest in dates relevant to student life and student responsibilities at PHCC. This discussion led to a proposal for a multi-functioning calendar application allowing students to access a calendar with course relevant dates, activities relevant dates, and important due dates for registration and enrollment activities.

The students participating in the mobile application focus group sessions provided a great deal of insight into student expectations for app functionality. Additionally, students were able to provide many insights into their vision of a useful map application for PHCC students. Finally, students offered multiple suggestions for future application development relevant to student engagement and academic success. The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment has prepared this report and is available for consult regarding any information presented herein.
West Campus Drafting and Design Technology Students

Desirable Features

- When asked what features were most important students emphasized reliability, user-friendliness, minimal storage requirements, and customizability to personal interests and needs (i.e. eliminate basketball feeds but receive volleyball feeds).

Academically Relevant Map

- Students were interested in an academically relevant application that provided:
  - A customizable calendar of assignments.
  - Direct access to their student email account.
  - Alerts for incoming grades and assignments.
  - Access to course and instructor evaluations.
- “Just like MyPHCC almost, but on an app.”
- Students unanimously preferred apps relevant to academics over apps relevant to student activities. However, students were still interested in activities related apps.

Activities Related Map

- Students mentioned an interest in an app reflecting the activities displayed in the PHCC planner.

Map App

- Some students felt a campus map app locating buildings and other campus locations would not be useful for existing students.
- Students felt a campus map app locating buildings and other campus locations for incoming students may be useful.
- It was mentioned that a map app drawing attention to last-minute class changes differing from originally published class locations would be helpful for students, especially incoming students.
- Students were interested in a map app indicating points of interest near the campus (i.e. restaurants, banks, gas stations).
- Students were unanimously opposed to a map app to the college.

Other Interesting Student Assertions/Interests

- Students discussed, in minimal detail, an interest in a:
  - App allowing students to contact college representatives (i.e. advisors) for appointments.
  - App for student dialogue.
  - App allowing students to check the availability of courses.
- Students indicated that there may be apps that are relevant to existing students and some that are more relevant to the general public or potential students. For example, an app similar to
MyPHCC would be of interest to existing students, whereas a campus map application would be of more interest to potential students or the general public.

- Students felt that there may be heavier use of some apps toward the end or beginning of the semester. For example, a campus map app may be used most heavily during the beginning of a semester.
- Students felt that, in general, PHCC students would be interested in apps made available by the college.
- Some students stated that they would prefer downloading only one PHCC app. Others were more open to downloading multiple applications. Student opinion was evenly split between the two scenarios.
Spring Hill Student Government and Student Worker Representatives

Desirable Features

- When asked what features were most important students emphasized reliability, user-friendliness, and an application that is clear, concise, and to the point.
- Students were averse to unsolicited information penetrating the function of the app (i.e. commercials).

Academically Relevant App

- Students were interested in an academically relevant application that provided:
  - A customizable calendar of assignments.
  - Quick options for contacting instructors including a way to message/email instructors.
  - Quick options for accessing courses.
  - Access to course and instructor evaluations.
- “Portable Angel.”

Calendar App

- Students were very interested in a multi-functioning calendar app. with course relevant dates, activities relevant dates, and important due dates for financial aid, graduation applications, registration, etc.
- Students expressed a desire for a calendar they can edit and that is also automatically updated with important college dates.
- Students also expressed a desire for a PHCC calendar that synchronizes with an Apple calendar.
- Students felt that communicating with students through a calendar app would be more effective than fliers or other traditional methods of communication. Students felt that communicating through a calendar app would put the needed information directly at the student’s fingertips.

Map App

- Students had suggestions for many variations of a PHCC map app including a:
  - Map app that helps students locate the campus from their home.
  - Map app that helps students travel between campuses.
  - GPS application that shows where you are on campus and how to get to where you want to be on campus. (For example, you are at building A to get the cafeteria turn....)
  - A map app indicating areas of interest around campus (i.e. restaurants, banks, gas stations).
- Many students in this group take or anticipate taking classes at multiple campuses. Students felt campus map apps would be useful to new and existing students taking classes at multiple PHCC campuses.
• Students also felt that campus map apps will allow existing students to better explain to new students where buildings, etc. are located on campus because they will be able to demonstrate locations on the app.

Other Interesting Student Assertions/Interests

• Students were interested in the availability of mobile PHCC applications.
• Students discussed, in minimal detail, an interest in a:
  o Scholarship application.
  o Search engine application.
  o News feed application for important college deadlines (i.e. financial aid, registration, etc.)
  o Application providing direct contact with PHCC faculty and administration.