The University of Arizona has licensed a tool to integrate student information systems and learning management systems to UA startup FishTail Technologies. The software, which simplifies the use of the University's complex D2L curriculum management system, resulted from the inventive work of a collaborative, multiunit team from the UA Office of Instruction and Assessment and University Information Technology Services.

Adam Brokamp, UITS senior business analyst, led the development project, which began in 2012, and included UITS team members David Baty, Jayaram Timsina and Alexander Angeles. OIA team members included Mark Felix, Garrett Flora and Mark Bryant.

Five years ago, the team set out to solve a very specific problem - the UA student information system did not integrate with the D2L learning management system employed at the University. In serving the UA's 40,000 students, faculty requests to set up or make changes to class sections in those systems were taking a great deal of time.

The regular task of hand-building courses required highly specialized technical knowledge.

"The annual process would essentially shut down our office for one to two weeks every year," Felix said. "Not only did it disrupt our work, but we'd be unable to respond to our normal flow of service requests for three or four days instead our normal turnaround time of a few hours."

Having undergone continuous improvements and now in its fourth version, the new system allows faculty, instructors and staff - those who used to make the requests - to input changes on their own and for audiences to see the updates in near real time.

"Costs for a similarly featured system to do what we're doing and service a University the size of the UA would range into six figures," Brokamp said. "It would have fewer features and just be wrong for the faculty."

Not only has the new integration tool empowered faculty through self-service functionality and faster results, it has freed up the UITS and OIA teams to focus on their core competencies - continuously innovating improvements to UA systems and solving bigger, more systemic challenges.

Tech Launch Arizona, the office of the UA that works to commercialize inventions stemming from University research and development, provided a variety of services and collaborated with the team to develop the product concept, and license it to the startup.

FishTail took advantage of a number of services TLA provides, including working with mentor-
in-residence Kevin McLaughlin to develop a go-to-market strategy, and participating in the TLA-administered National Science Foundation I-Corps program, where FishTail learned about lean startup methods and gained a better understanding of target customers.

"We are now focusing on creating greater impact with University-developed software solutions like FishTail and Scholarship Universe," said TLA licensing manager Lewis Humphreys, who focuses on software and information technologies. "FishTail is a great example of the UA developing software-enabled services for our own community, and then those solutions having broader commercial applications beyond the walls of the University."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/ua-startup-targets-improved-information-systems-and-services-faculty-and-students

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