CALSTATE S4 — A STUDENT-CENTERED, USER-DRIVEN TRACKING AND DATA SOLUTION

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

The CSU Center for Community Engagement launched an online program, CalState S4, to centrally manage students' off-campus academic opportunities – such as Internships, service-learning activities and research projects – and ensure quality, safety and value of each placement.

An integral part of each student's California State University education is off-campus learning experiences, such as internships, service-learning activities, research projects and many other opportunities for both immersion in the professional community and civic engagement. Access to high-quality and high-impact placements, particularly for students from historically under-served communities, support campus efforts to close equity gaps, decrease time to degree and increase completion rates.

Since 2010, the Chancellor's Office Center for Community Engagement (COCCE) has been developing an online database, CalState S4 (Student Success, Staff Support, Site Safety and Smart Statistics), to manage and track students' off-campus academic learning experiences. The program supports multiple CSU campuses and programs addressing common concerns and sharing solutions related to guaranteeing high-quality academic placements in the community.

CalState S4 captures a record of activities, time frames and academic outcomes for each student. Access to accurate and clear data provided by the program enables faculty to provide guidance grounded in each students' interests and career goals.

The purpose of CalState S4:

1. Manage risk concerns and requirements associated with off-campus academic placements and requirements specifically outlined in the CSU Chancellor's Executive Orders.

2. Collect reliable and accurate data from CSU campuses about off-campus academic learning activities and opportunities taking place, along with the teaching and learning practices that are beneficial to college students from varying backgrounds..

3. Collate and analyze off-campus placement information from CSU campuses to better understand the impact on student success, graduation and retention rates.

4. Increase efficiency with cloud-based technology and systems integration to share and store information.

MILESTONES

2008-10
- CSU Monterey Bay creates and implements a digital tracking system for the university's Service Learning Institute, called My Service Learning Placement (MYSLP) and updates it in 2011 using open-source software programs, such as Drupal.

May 2010
- COCCE hosts system-wide webinars showcasing possible databases to support community engagement and the CSU's risk management policies. As a result, campuses decide that they want to implement MYSLP, which works in conjunction with the CSU's already familiar PeopleSoft system.

Fall 2010
- COCCE partners with CSUMB Web Services to develop CalState S4 to support multiple off-campus academic learning experiences.

2011-12
- Version 1 of CalState S4 is complete as a downloadable single web application.
- Training is offered over two academic years and includes administrators and IT staff.
- Campus IT offices indicate that they do not have the server and staffing resources to manage CalState S4, and COCCE takes on hosting services with Acquia.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

Community Partnerships:

- More than 20,000 active community partner sites are part of a student-searchable online database.

- More than 10,000 partner contracts have been digitally executed and/or digitally stored.

Student Placements:

- 26,000 CSU student placements are captured within CalState S4 each year, giving the CSU crucial data on both community and student impact.

- It takes a student less than 20 minutes to complete a placement application online, including all relevant required risk paperwork, which is digitally stored and immediately accessible online by staff and faculty.

Student Information Systems Integration:

- Of the programs utilizing CalState S4, an average of 3,500 courses and more than 61,000 student enrollments each academic year have an off-campus learning component as part of the curriculum.

- CalState S4 differentiates itself from other tracking software platforms by using student information systems and single sign-on access while also collecting and analyzing quality data from the student's learning experience — a component that similar systems lack.

IMPACT AND BENEFITS

Clear advantages have emerged with multiple campus programs using a systemwide database:

- Use of a single system allows more effective inter- and intra-campus collaboration and support.

- Data integration with campus student information systems takes advantage of existing technological systems and decreases manual entry by staff.

- Use of terminology has become more consistent across the CSU, resulting in more unified practices.

- Mandatory reporting of community engagement activities to the Chancellor's Office is built into the system, easing the significant time and effort required for reporting.

- The Chancellor's Office is able to directly access data.

- By implementing this efficient tracking tool at the system level, the CSU is now able to consolidate crucial data, allowing further analyzation for how off-campus academic learning placement plays an integral role in student learning and success.

MILESTONES

2012-13

- 11 campus student-learning programs pilot the hosted version of CalState S4; COCCE fully covers the cost of CalState S4 for the campuses and hires a student assistant.

- CSUMB Web Services team provides ongoing development and staff support for CalState S4.

- Only three campuses make progress with utilizing CalState S4 over the course of two years.

2013

- Migration of version 2 of CalState S4 commences.

- As part of the Graduation Initiative, COCCE receives funding to support the expansion of CalState S4 to promote high-impact practices.

- A part-time CalState S4 project coordinator is hired through June 2018.

- 17 campuses commit to pilot and initially charged a small fee.

2014-15

- CalState S4 fully transitions to the COCCE.
- A CalState S4 developer is hired.

2015-17

- Internships and social work modules are developed.

- CalState S4 sees a one-year growth in the number of campuses and programs utilizing the program: More than 17,000 live placements are captured with 13 live campuses and six piloting.

LESSONS LEARNED

1 While service learning has been institutionalized across the CSU and benefits from system-wide leadership and coordination, it is not the case for most high-impact programs in the CSU. CalState S4 has played a crucial role in supporting the shortage in administrative support structures by allowing for fluid communication processes across all parties (staff, faculty, students and community partners), as well as minimizing the paperwork associated with what can be burdensome administrative risk-management compliance. By using a consortium model with campuses working together, CSU offices representing a wide range of off-campus learning programs are able to learn from each other, standardize practices, and share dedicated support staff.

2 With a collaborative project like this, participants must be affirmed for innovation and risk-taking, and possess a growth mentality toward the project. The much coveted and rather humorous "S4 golden guinea pig award" is one way to celebrate campuses in the previous year who have taken risks and used CalState S4 to creatively problem-solve.

3 Implementing new digital systems is a difficult task for any program. After implementation of CalState S4 at Cal State East Bay, the campus and CalState S4 staff co-presented a poster presentation, "Top Ten Tips for Tackling Tracking Technology," to help other campuses facing common implementation woes with new digital systems.

PROJECT TEAM

CSU MONTEREY BAY TEAM:

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Judy Botelho, director of CalState S4, left, and Brianna Wagner, CalState S4 developer and technical support.

CalState S4 manages and tracks students' off-campus academic learning experiences.

MILESTONES

Summer 2017

- An online time log feature is implemented along with the ability to track and place students in non-academic experiences, such as one-day community service or alternative break experiences.

- A new institutionalized fee structure is implemented during the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

- Currently, 15 CSU campuses with 32 campus programs utilize the system, helping to place on average 26,000 students annually.

Future Plans

- In spring 2020, development of CalState S4 version 3 in Drupal 8 will commence.

- Full utilization expected by all campuses in fall 2022.

FURTHER REFERENCES

CalState S4 information:
https://calstates4.com/