



VSB at Kent State University: improving academic advising sessions and impressing students



Kent State University implemented Visual Schedule Builder in the summer of 2016 to streamline the student schedule planning and registration process. The software has been resounding success for both students and staff at the university, which caters to over 40,000 students across several campuses across Northeast Ohio.

"What used to be a very time-consuming process has now been boiled down to something they can do in a couple minutes on their cell phone."

Lynette Johnson Associate Registrar

Prior to the university acquiring VSB, students and advisors had to sit down with a home-made spreadsheet to work out how to fit their required and desired courses together. Course times and locations had to be manually cross-referenced and checked for clashes. Once students and advisors had come up with a timetable that worked, students registered for classes online. Often it was a race against clock, given that in-demand classes could fill up by the time students had mapped out their schedule.

VSB allows students to see class availability as and when they are compiling their schedule, so that there are no surprises when they register. "It's pretty close to real-time data," said Associate University Registrar Lynette Johnson.

VSB also allows students to filter out undesirable schedules by using VSB's time-blocking feature, where students can identify times they are consistently unavailable each week, and by sorting by preferred time periods.

VSB has impressed Kent State academic advisors, who are responsible for guiding students through the scheduling and registration process. "It's great having everything together in one place instead of going back and forth," said Sarah Sobeh, an academic advisor for the College of Communication and Information.



University Registrar Gail Rebeta said the acquisition of VSB is in line with a university-wide “move away from transactional-based advising towards transformational, where advisors spend more time working with students and looking at long-term goals, instead of focusing only on what classes they are taking for next semesters.”

Indeed, by making the scheduling process simpler and more intuitive, VSB frees up time for advisors to focus on the other parts of their crucial role in advising

sessions. Michael Gershe, advisor in the College of Aeronautics and Engineering said his sessions are now shorter and easier.

The software was quickly adopted by the student population; Yza Melvin, senior reporting analyst in the IT department, noted that traffic to the VSB website was “really high compared to what we anticipated.” Rebeta credited this to the software being a far more “user-friendly solution” for students than the previous approach.

VSB allows students to find a schedule that “works best with their overall personal schedule, their work schedule, any other activities in their life, as well as anything else that fits into their long term institutional plan for getting through their program as quickly and as easily as possible.”

Gail Rebeta, University Registrar

Sobeh said that the graphic design and photo majors in the communications department are thrilled by the software’s look and the way each timetable is color coded. “They are visual learners,” she explained.

According to Sobeh, freshmen really benefit from VSB’s ‘favorites’ feature. “They need to have three of four different schedules to pick from as freshman classes fill up fast” she explained. “When they have multiple schedules saved, it prevents them from getting frustrated when certain classes fill up at the last minute and one schedule is no longer available”.



Sobeh added the tool is also very helpful for students transferring to Kent from other schools. Orientation at a brand-new school can be daunting and is made easier when students can master scheduling and registration quickly.

The team at the registrar’s office are hopeful that VSB’s back-end data will have an important effect on student satisfaction. The end goal, said Rebeta, is “to utilize the information that we can get out of VSB to make better decisions for students and to decrease frustrations amongst the student body. You can lose students just because they are frustrated with the system.”

“The color coding is its best feature; it makes it visually appealing and that really helps.”

Michael Gershe, academic advisor, College of Aeronautics and Engineering.