University of Idaho

VANDAL OVERNIGHT GAMES

Title: Vandal Overnight Games at the University of Idaho

Category: Cross Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

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State: Idaho

Project Initiation: April 2014

Project Completion: October 2014

Executive Summary
Recruiting and retaining post-secondary students in Idaho is challenging. Universities are an important part of the local community and economy and as such need to collaborate with local government, businesses, and citizens. The reaches of the University of Idaho also extend globally in the areas of research contributing to solutions for humanitarian issues. Within Idaho, producing an educated workforce helps the State become more vibrant and improves the quality of life for its citizens; this is an additional responsibility of the University. The go-on and graduation rates are greatly impacted by cultural and economic situations and the University of Idaho needs to focus its enthusiasm and innovation when developing opportunities to attract and retain students.

Information Technology Services (ITS), at the University of Idaho, through its vision to be "the partner of choice for technology advancement and innovation" is actively seeking opportunities that could have an impact across the institution in the support of the University's goals. ITS staff are helping with enterprise systems and creative solutions.

To this end, ITS developed the Vandal Overnight Games series. It was born from a bunch of geeky staff talking about how fun it is to play videogames. The dream began as a whole night of video game playing with free food, big screens, and prizes. All of a sudden this became a concept for helping engage students and gained traction. A project team was formed and they developed relationships with University departments and local businesses creating a sustainable event series which engages students, helps recruit new ones, and builds trust in relationships across the institution and the community.

Ultimately, Vandal Overnight Games helps students succeed by maintaining their engagement during their tenure at the University of Idaho. It is the Institution's responsibility to help students succeed and confer degrees. Student successes will contribute to Idaho realizing its goal of 60 percent of all citizens ages 25 to 34 having degrees or certificates and offers businesses located in the State a well-educated pool of employees. When businesses succeed, citizens will realize a better economy and an improved quality of life across Idaho.

Business Problem and Solution Description

Idaho Office of the State Board of Education and Complete College Idaho
Complete College Idaho (CCI), a program crafted by the Idaho Office of the State Board of Education (OSBE), "set an ambitious goal that 60% of Idahoans ages 25-34 will have a degree or certificate by 2020."[1] The plan outlines several Key Strategies including:
- Strengthen the Pipeline,
- Transform Remediation,
- Structure for Success,
- Reward Progress and Completion, and
- Leverage Partnerships.

The CCI plan includes information from Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce, which estimates more than 60% of Idaho jobs will require post-secondary training, certification or degree by 2018. Unfortunately today, only 35% of Idahoans have obtained some sort of postsecondary education.[2]

While the University of Idaho needs to recruit more students, it will also need to retain the current students enrolled at the institution. The University of Idaho is investing in college and career readiness initiatives (Strengthen the Pipeline, Transform Remediation, Structure for Success) today. These initiatives will improve student retention and engagement and help meet the OSBE's goal. Additionally, the University of Idaho is working to leverage partnerships in the Moscow community and across the State in an effort to build a strong community of support for post-secondary education.

Business Problem
Recruiting and retaining post-secondary students in Idaho is challenging. The University is an important part of the local community and economy and as such needs to collaborate with local government, businesses, and citizens. The reaches of the University of Idaho also extend globally in the areas of research contributing to solutions for humanitarian issues. Within Idaho, producing an educated workforce helps the State become more vibrant and improves the quality of life for its citizens; this is an additional responsibility of the University. The go-on and graduation rates are greatly impacted by cultural and economic situations and the University of Idaho needs to focus its enthusiasm and innovation when developing opportunities to attract and retain students.

Last year, University of Idaho's newly hired President, Chuck Staben, shared his primary goals for the University of Idaho: engaging and retaining students, developing research opportunities, strategically approaching distance education services, and helping employees succeed. Improving admission and retention rates at the University of Idaho can help improve Idaho's economy and its citizens' quality of life.

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[1] http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/cci.asp
[2] http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/board_initiatives/cci/documents/cci_plan.pdf

The means to achieve the State Board's goals for education in Idaho must be a collaborative effort and, for the University of Idaho, this includes initiatives with the local government, community and businesses to offer current and prospective students with opportunities that engage them and inspire them to complete their degrees.

Information Technology Services' vision at the University of Idaho, "is committed to its leadership role of fostering the University's goals through being the partner of choice for technology advancement and innovation." ITS actively seeks opportunities that could impact the institution in the support of the State Board of Education's and the University's goals. ITS staff are helping develop enterprise systems and creative solutions.

IT departments are not typically associated with driving student retention numbers higher, let alone innovating solutions for doing so. However, after working under the new vision for ITS, the concept of helping departments and colleges succeed with technology solutions began to permeate ITS. Some employees found themselves thinking about extending the vision and how they might be able to be the partner of choice for our University's most important asset, its students.

Unfortunately, with the state of the economy in recent years, budgets have been more harshly scrutinized and the priority of efforts for improving student enrollment and retention have been widely discussed. ITS at the University of Idaho, as at most public universities, has had to take on fulfilling the evermore rapidly changing technology needs across the institution with little to no permanent staff or budget increases for several years. In this way it is understood that improved enrollment and retention directly impacts the resources available to ITS. Yet, there are few apparent ways for ITS to contribute more directly to improving these situations.

Coupling student engagement and retention with the idea that ITS could be a partner of choice for students is a powerful concept. Typically students at the University of Idaho approach ITS only when they forget their password, are having trouble with their email or need to connect a device to the wireless network. Students often may not view ITS as an innovative leader and partner for their education, but rather simply as a utility for helping get their papers turned in and to communicate with faculty.

Solution Description
How can ITS staff help the Idaho State Board of Education and President Staben with their mission to engage and retain students? Several employees, who in their spare time play video games into the early hours of the morning with friends, realized this is something many students do too. So, the dream began: a whole night of video game playing with free food, big screens, and prizes. The idea for ITS helping to engage students quickly gained traction.

As Vandal Overnight Games was largely conceived by ITS analysts and Help Desk staff, it was convenient for ITS to also use this opportunity to develop leadership skills for some employees by setting them up to succeed as leaders of this project. A junior-

level analyst was selected to lead the project for the first event and others were invited to participate on a project team that would be responsible for all logistics of Vandal Overnight Games.

The team began to frame the event and reached out to multiple departments on campus and small businesses in the region. Many were interested and a few decided to help us produce Vandal Overnight Games. The Associated Students of the University of Idaho's Department of Student Involvement helped fund Vandal Overnight as one of their alcohol-alternative events. The University of Idaho's Auxiliary Services and dining contractor, Sodexo, committed to providing food for the event at a sustainably subsidized cost to ITS. And local businesses ran their own gaming events throughout the evening.

The event hosted by ITS at the core of the University's campus in Moscow, ID, included tournaments with prizes, bring your own device free-play stations, live feeds of worldwide gaming tournaments, and tabletop games. The event is possible in part because the ITS Network Team developed a high-speed, low-latency network for participants to use during their time at the event. Vandal Overnight Games invites participants from the University of Idaho, City of Moscow, and others from the Palouse region.

Working hard to drive improvements to student enrollment and retention, the University is intensifying its work with the City of Moscow driving collaboration between local businesses, citizens, faculty, students, and staff. The Vandal Overnight Games events are an example of how ITS staff can actively contribute towards these goals.

Significance
The University hosts several different events for students to take a break from their studies including concerts, movies, and fairs. Vandal Overnight Games however helps involve a group of students who are rarely targeted. Gamers tend to play in small groups or alone, and by hosting a large scale event, sponsored by the University, participants directly meet other gamers and students with similar interests. ITS was able to target disenfranchised students who may not feel they belong by offering a unique event. This builds communities and helps retain students at the University of Idaho.

Over 200 students participated in the inaugural Vandal Overnight Games during the fall 2014 semester. Another event was held in April 2015 engaging more than 350 participants. This number is expected to improve as interest climbs and better marketing methods are used. Still, for a relatively low cost of less than $5,000, ITS has been able to help drive student engagement, partner with University departments, and build relationships with local businesses.

Vandal Overnight Games is only one facet created to help realize President Staben's goals for student enrollment and retention and the Idaho State Board of Education's Complete College Idaho Plan. Idaho must address the skills gap already affecting the

state. According to the Board's CCI plan, the current generation "is at risk of being the first in our country's history to be less educated than their parents."[3]

Finally, if more citizens of Idaho seek higher education and Idaho institutions are successful at conferring degrees and certifications, then graduates will experience a better quality of life. While graduates benefit, the State and its citizens will realize a better economy and well-being in Idaho as well.

Benefit of the Project

Vandal Overnight Games supports three of the five Key Strategies of Complete College Idaho.

First, since the event is not only geared towards University of Idaho students, but also citizens of the City of Moscow and surrounding communities it aids to *Strengthen the Pipeline* ensuring potential post-secondary students get a taste of campus life and events the University sponsors. This is a direct example of how the University is giving citizens another opportunity to feel positive effects on campus.

> *"Gaming is a great hobby and it's a great idea to bring folks together like this. It lets interested parties also learn more about different kinds of games. I saw a lot of folks have fun with board games, and meet some folks they got along great with."* –Vandal Overnight Games Participant

Second, Vandal Overnight Games engages students by *Rewarding Progress and Completion*. The event celebrates students of the University of Idaho and provides them a place to meet new people, take a break from coursework and, most importantly, shows students the University cares for their general well-being.

Vandal Overnight Games provides incentive for students to stay and graduate from the University of Idaho. Many participants mentioned they were going to tell their friends at other universities and back home about this event specifically. Hopes are high that with continued successes like Vandal Overnight Games, current students will encourage their local and online friends to consider attending the University of Idaho.

We polled Vandal Overnight Games participants about what their favorite part of the event was and here are some of their answers:

> *"Watching my brother lose at Mario Cart to President Staben. The music was awesome."*

> *"The food and environment. I came to check it out and ended up going home and grabbing my computer and came back and staying for hours."*

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[3] http://www.boardofed.idaho.gov/board_initiatives/cci/documents/cci_plan.pdf

Finally, new relationships have been created between departments on campus and within the community helping *Leverage Partnerships* and strengthening collaborations between education and business partners. By inviting local vendors and gaming clubs to join us, University students are presented in a positive light. Vendors benefit too by introducing students to their products and services offered in our community, which students may not have been aware of. Large scale vendors continue to receive information on the value of partnering with the University not only for Vandal Overnight Games but also by offering their services to employees and students.

> *"I have had the pleasure of working with the University of Idaho ITS team […] for the first two Vandal Overnight Games events. I am lucky enough to get to be the voice of the event as the MC for all the Tournaments that are run there. […] The exposure for our business and […] the fun had by all the students makes this an event I look forward to helping plan and volunteering to work at every semester."* –Trever Schell, Store Manager, Video Game Headquarters

Conclusion
Vandal Overnight Games was born from a bunch of geeky staff talking about how fun it is to play videogames. They took the idea and developed relationships with University departments and local businesses creating a sustainable biannual event which engages students, helps recruit new ones, and builds trust in relationships across the institution and its community.

Ultimately, Vandal Overnight Games helps students succeed by maintaining their engagement during their tenure at the University of Idaho. It is the Institution's responsibility to help students succeed, confer degrees and help the State of Idaho realize its goal of 60 percent of all citizens ages 25 to 34 as graduates or certificate holders ensuring businesses located in the State have a well-educated pool of employees.