



How Empire State University Unifies A Decentralized Campus With AI Technology



IMPACT SNAPSHOT

- **Increased** virtual self-service by **234%**
- **Increased** fall-to-fall retention by **3.7%**
- **Saved \$127,400** and 5,460 employee hours
- Used Chatbot data to discover website pages and resources to clarify
- **Significantly reduced call volume** and wait times

About Empire State University

Empire State University spans more than a dozen satellite locations across the state of New York, serving primarily adult learners — 67% of their students are between the ages of 25 and 49. Empire State University is committed to supporting students by helping them develop individualized degree programs designed to fit the unique backgrounds and experiences of each student.

The Challenge

Mary Austin, director of 1Stop Student Services at the institution, had been hunting for the right AI chatbot technology as the next step in achieving their mission of empowering students to self-action, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The college was fielding an exceptionally high number of questions from students during times of uncertainty and rapid change, and administrators knew they needed tools and resources aimed at helping Empire State University's students (spread out across every region of New York state) seek and find information with ease. And when Enser attended an Ocelot presentation, she knew she was on the right track.

The Solution

The Empire State University team knew they needed a solution that required minimal support from university employees, with a backend easy enough for someone without a software engineering degree to navigate. And that was a major factor in their choice to partner with Ocelot.

Ocelot's highly engaged service team provided the external support Empire State University needed to ensure that the new tool would successfully launch without overwhelming the university's IT department. The service team also provides ongoing support and oversight.

Not only was the solution easy to program and embed within the college's website, but the support during implementation was so seamless that the team was able to launch Ocelot in just two months, significantly earlier than her initial timeline.

Empire State University's chatbot was positioned to fill a significant void, giving students access to supplemental support around the clock, including an extensive library of knowledge-based articles and informative videos. These resources encouraged students to become more engaged and self-serving along their educational journey.

Empire State University named their Chatbot after the school's mascot, a bluebird named "Blue" and produced a lighthearted video introducing the newest call center team member and shared it across multiple communication channels.

The Impact

With their new AI-powered tools and technology in place, the Empire State University team were ready to reap the benefits, especially with summer term starting up.

Summer is Empire State University's header term, marking the starting point of the school's annual financial aid cycle. Both the 1Stop and financial aid offices anticipate a barrage of questions during this time, but at the beginning of the Summer 2021 term there was a palpable difference.

"It was probably two or three days before the term started," says Michelle Campbell, Empire State University's director of financial aid. "[My team] came to me and said, 'I think something's wrong. I think something's not working right, because students aren't here. There must be something big that didn't happen for everything to be so quiet.' But it was actually the opposite. It was that everything was working. Students knew exactly what they needed ahead of time."

The team at Empire State University was ready to pop the champagne corks. The seamless (and quiet) start to the term meant they'd found a winning combination to effectively serve and support students.



On top of the decrease in call and appointment volume, the team has quickly learned that they can leverage the Ocelot platform's backend to access data that provides valuable insight into student needs and concerns.

Recently, the 1Stop team found themselves discussing the accessibility of course selection information on the website. Rather than making an educated guess about the effectiveness of the current formatting, Austin turned to Blue.

She quickly pulled student inquiry reports and determined that the Chatbot had engaged in 74 conversations about course scheduling since going live.

The number informed the team's decision — information on class registration needed to be easier for students to find. This data led the college to an extensive webpage overhaul, using Blue to help identify opportunities for places where 1Stop can reduce content bloat.

While there was an initial concern that driving students away from phones and toward AI-powered support would cause them to feel less connected to the college, they quickly learned otherwise. The Empire State University team found that the drop in call volume allowed both teams to finally pursue initiatives and projects they knew would improve the student experience.

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