



Location: Camarillo, CA

Focus Areas: Community; Academic Supports

Opening in 2002, California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) is a mid-size (7,112 undergraduates) public, Hispanic Serving Institution and the 23rd campus in the California State University system.

At A Glance:

- » Expanded the reach of an artificial intelligence chatbot, Ekahobot, to provide 24/7 support to multiple student groups
- » Developed a micro-course (Learning Online 101) to ensure students had the tools, skills, and support needed for online course offering

Approach Overview

CSUCI launched two significant innovation efforts focused on supporting student success in the virtual environment. These efforts highlight CSUCI's commitment to student success through innovation. Initiatives were planned prior to the move to virtual instruction in 2020, but have had a significant impact on the successful transition and continued virtual operations.

CSUCI's Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbot, [Ekahobot](#), is powered by Admithub and was launched as a pilot with first-time freshmen and transfers in the Fall of 2019 to improve student retention. When the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020, CSUCI began expanding the bot's reach to additional student groups. The chatbot is now available to the entire undergraduate student population, with the focus of retention expanding to all undergraduates to support them through virtual learning. Ekahobot provides social communication (through its topics communicated, tone, language, and availability) designed to foster a relationship with students providing a trusted resource accessible any time. CSUCI has intentionally engaged students and provided a unique pathway to get their questions answered 24/7, receive helpful information and encouragement, and create a sense of community in spite of distance learning. Using Ekahobot, CSUCI is able to design micro-campaigns specifically tailored to certain students. The use of micro-campaigns allows for personalized messaging to the students that need it, when they need it, in a style of communication that is easily received along with rapid responses to follow up questions.

[Learning Online 101](#) (LO101) is a short online course launched in Fall 2018 as a tool for students taking online courses. Built in Canvas, LO101 reduces technological barriers so faculty and students can focus their energy on teaching and learning, not learning technology. It provides students with the essential skills, tools, and support needed to have engaging online learning experiences. LO101 specifically focuses on teaching students both the technological and study skills necessary for academic success, including strategies for self-motivation, time management, navigating and interacting with online content. When students complete LO101 they receive a digital badge certifying course completion. CSUCI leverages Badgr.io in tandem with Canvas to issue and manage badges. The LO101 badge does not expire and serves as evidence of completion if required in future University courses.

LO101 eases the time and pressure faculty experience when fielding students' technical questions. CSUCI has found it most effective to include LO101 in faculty development offerings for online teaching. This includes any faculty development program specific to developing and facilitating online courses. Additionally, LO101 does not require synchronous community engagement, but provides opportunities to interact asynchronously with peers. Students can post to a digital bulletin board, listen to advice from students and faculty, and share their "WHY" for going to college.

Having partnerships in place helped the team develop tailored communications campaigns and continuously improve the delivery of both Ekahobot and LO101, as highlighted below:

“It's not just having structures in place, but it's the right people at the right time.”

“Being able to really understand that explaining technology to users is going to be different for every single person is important, because we each have our own lexicon of terms that we understand. Being able to translate that into terms that your user understands that doesn't make it scary is really important.”

“It's the humans behind the technology that make the difference. You have technology, but it's the people that are the voice behind that who are so important.”

Learn more at virtualsuccess.naspa.org