



Location: Houston, TX

Focus Areas: Advising; Academic supports

Houston Community College (HCC) is a multi-campus, open admissions community college that serves over a diverse population of over 56,000 undergraduate students in the greater Houston area.



At A Glance:

- » Launched a Live Virtual Lobby to triage student needs and provide streamlined, one-on-one real-time services and support
- » Scaled the system across all colleges and 21 campuses across the district

Approach Overview

The [Live Virtual Lobby](#) was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As students shifted into online environments, HCC experienced high volumes of demand from students who needed quick answers to questions and who had no means of communicating with the college other than email or phone. Students were not always able to schedule future appointments or wait for hours to meet with an advisor. In response to this, HCC created a Live Virtual Lobby through Zoom, where students could either call in by phone or login to via smart phone/computer/tablet, go through an initial screening to identify services needed, and then be sent to an individual breakout room to have a one-on-one service experience with student services personnel. Student wait times for services and number of student complaints were significantly reduced as a result. The Zoom platform allowed HCC to control access to the service, and it allowed for the quick creation of breakout rooms, which were used for one-on-one student to student services personnel sessions.

HCC initially piloted the Live Virtual Lobby for student advising services through one college to determine the Virtual Lobby's efficacy and to confirm if it met institutional student services standards. Once the tool was determined to be effective in

serving both institutional and student needs, six of HCC's College's student services dean's agreed to pool resources to implement the Live Virtual Lobby across the district. Additionally, a second Virtual Lobby was developed, but for the other student services departments at HCC (testing, enrollment services, counseling, veterans and international student services). Zoom rooms were labeled based on whether a student needed to be directed to enrollment services, admissions, advisors, testing, counseling, etc.

To reduce information overload for students, HCC started routing all students through a single link found on the main HCC landing page for all questions and concerns. HCC engaged in multiple communication methods to increase awareness of the service. In addition to sharing a link on HCC's main webpage, advisors have their HCC email setup to auto-reply with the direct-link to the Virtual Lobby, as well as they have their HCC voicemail setup with directions to the Virtual Lobby. For students that call into one of HCC's call centers or directly to one of HCC's campuses, staff have the contact information to the Virtual Lobbies. HCC Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts were also leveraged to raise awareness about the Virtual Lobby.

In addition to having careful planning about student experiences with the Lobby, the project team also emphasizes the institution's strong willingness to adapt when scaling out to other divisions and colleges as critical element to the Live Virtual Lobby's success:

“Our magic formula was all in the flow. How the students will flow once they enter and in the naming conventions that we followed.”

“I think what really helped us was getting upper-level leadership to actually see our system in action, see how it helped students out, and how we got feedback from students. Then they understood how we were helping students get the services they wanted and needed.”

“We've modified our delivery model based on our needs, what we've seen work, and how we thought an approach would best suit our students. You can start out with one platform and see what's working, what's not working, and make those adaptations.”

Learn more at virtualsuccess.naspa.org