IMPROVING STUDENT SUCCESS THROUGH UX: A 2025–26 FACULTY FELLOWS PROJECT UPDATE ADVANCING USER EXPERIENCE AT UAGC

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It is with great pleasure that I share an update on the progress of our 2025–26 Faculty Fellows project. As many of you know, I have the privilege of partnering with UX Researcher Jacline Contrino, whose background in human-centered design has guided many organizations through meaningful quality-improvement cycles. Working alongside her has been both energizing and inspiring as we explore new ways to elevate the University of Arizona Global Campus student academic experience.

When we began this project, Jacline Contrino brought forward the Double Diamond design process, a four-step framework widely used for designing solutions to complex problems. She was exceptionally well equipped to help UAGC apply this model, which emphasizes discovering user needs, defining core issues, designing meaningful improvements, and delivering tested, refined solutions. With my coaching and planning background, Jacline and I built a detailed Gantt chart to map out the phases, activities, and deliverables of our research effort. This combination of her UX expertise and my structuring and support ensured that we entered the project well-organized and aligned. While I have offered coaching and consultation where needed, Jacline's initiative, leadership, and ongoing engagement with students and stakeholders have been outstanding, and together we are making strong progress.

A Four-Step Human-Centered Design Approach

The Double Diamond process aligns with UAGC's commitment to clarity, quality, and continuous improvement. Its four stages—Discover, Define, Design, and Deliver—allow us to frame complex challenges through the lens of student experience. This framework ensures that our recommendations will be thoughtful, relevant, and grounded in authentic user needs.

What We Learned in the Discovery Phase

Throughout the fall, Jacline conducted stakeholder conversations across many academic and student services teams, led a faculty focus group, reviewed available survey data and past research, and performed lean walkthroughs across several UAGC platforms - including the classroom. Constellation textbooks, Library, and Writing Center. From these efforts, several opportunities emerged:

- Information architecture: We can enhance how content is labeled and organized across the classroom and supporting platforms.

- User interface improvements: We identified low-lift adjustments, such as more visible tabs, that could create smoother navigation.

- Content strategy: Many students experience "walls of text"; using plain language and more concise guidance can reduce overwhelm.
- Mobile-friendly design: Students increasingly rely on mobile devices, making responsive design a necessity for accessibility and success.

These insights affirm what many of us hear in our daily work: students thrive when their environment is organized, consistent, and easy to navigate.

Early Themes from Student Interviews

Jacline is now deep into the next phase—interviewing and conducting usability tests with a variety of students, including GEN101 students, experienced students, military students, and more. Her early findings offer both encouragement and clear direction:

- Positive classroom experience: Students generally find the classroom intuitive and feel confident navigating it.
- Initial overwhelm: Newer students often struggle to locate key resources due to inconsistent labels and navigation across tools.
- Value of consistency: Students appreciate predictable tools, terminology, and expectations, especially during transitions or system updates.
- Point-of-need support: Time-strapped students rely heavily on self-service tools such as Grammarly, RefWorks, and AI resources, often close to deadlines.
- Library appreciation with room to grow: Students love the UAGC Library, yet they expressed interest in stronger collections, clearer menus, and improved mobile usability.
- Motivation through connection: Perhaps most powerfully, students emphasized that their greatest motivators are engaged instructors, personalized feedback, and a sense of community.

These themes align strongly with our quality and academic excellence goals, reminding us that technology and pedagogy must work hand in hand.

What Comes Next

Jacline completed the remaining student interviews and usability testing in late November and will fully synthesize the data in December. She plans to prepare a comprehensive findings report for our wider academic teams in January. Morgan Johnson's recent recap of our UX update meetings reflects the excitement and engagement across departments, and we look forward to continuing those conversations after the holidays.

As we advance this work, we encourage faculty, staff, and leaders across UAGC to stay connected with us. Whether you have insights, questions, or recommendations—or know students interested in participating—your contribution is invaluable.

A Shared Commitment to Excellence

Partnering with Jacline has reinforced the importance of human-centered design in higher education. Her expertise, combined with our collective dedication to students, positions us to make meaningful, value-added improvements that align with UAGC's mission of excellence and accessibility.

I look forward to updating you again through the Chronicle and in future meetings as Jacline Contrino and I continue this important work.

Let's all keep on keeping on! Students first!