How Universities Are Rapidly Adapting to Changing Circumstances With Their Mobile Campus Apps

As universities launched their fall semesters, each adopted the model that works best for them in line with state guidelines, local concerns, and availability of space and resources to enable social distancing. Yet even the best-laid plans have gone awry as COVID-19 outbreaks around the country and internationally have caused some abrupt and repeated changes in plans.

Beyond governmental policy impacting school and student plans — such as the US forbidding certain international students from entering the country for the fall semester — students must adjust to the new normal. Undoubtedly, this is not the college experience incoming freshmen had envisioned. Even returning students must adjust to learning online or in a hybrid model and being separated from on-campus friends. In addition to addressing these concerns, schools must figure out how to deliver a digital campus experience to remote students that goes beyond academics to address the whole student.

Harnessing the Power of Mobile Campus Apps

To adjust to these rapidly changing — and new — circumstances, many schools are embracing a distributed campus. Integral to this, they are calling upon a mobile app to enable a confident, safe return for those coming to campus.

Modo is answering that call by helping universities bring campus to life digitally for their distributed campuses, whether students and faculty are on campus or remote. Modo's customers are finding that their campus app is the only tool that allows them to adapt quickly and stay connected with and engage their digital-native communities as circumstances change.

Now that the app truly is the new campus, here are two schools using the Modo platform to do just that, enabling them to address seismic changes characterized by ongoing uncertainty to reach students wherever they are.

Roosevelt University Rapidly Deploys a Return-to-Campus App

Roosevelt University – a private university with campuses in Chicago, Peoria, Waukegan and Schaumburg, Illinois — called upon the Modo solution to quickly roll out its Return-to-Campus module in its Roosevelt Mobile app. By using Modo Campus and its functionalities, the school was able to bring back a percentage of its students and staff to the new normal for the 2020 fall semester.
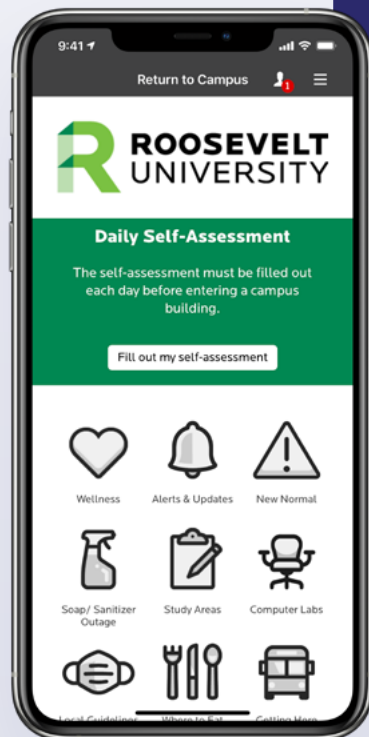
### The goals of the school's Return-to-Campus module were to:

- Provide all students, staff and faculty with necessary information and resources to return to campus safely or continue studying and working remotely

- Help all students, staff and faculty determine whether it's safe to come to campus

- Provide appropriate offices with information to aid in contact tracing in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak on campus

Roosevelt's approach for addressing these needs was to add a Return-to-Campus persona as a complement to existing personas for current students and New Student Orientation happening virtually.

Here are the ways Roosevelt's Return-to-Campus module is enabling a safe return to campus.

First, students, staff and faculty must complete **a daily health self-assessment** in the Roosevelt app to gain entry to all university buildings. If cleared for entry, they must show the app screen to Campus Safety staff before entering. If they are denied entry, they are instructed to leave campus.
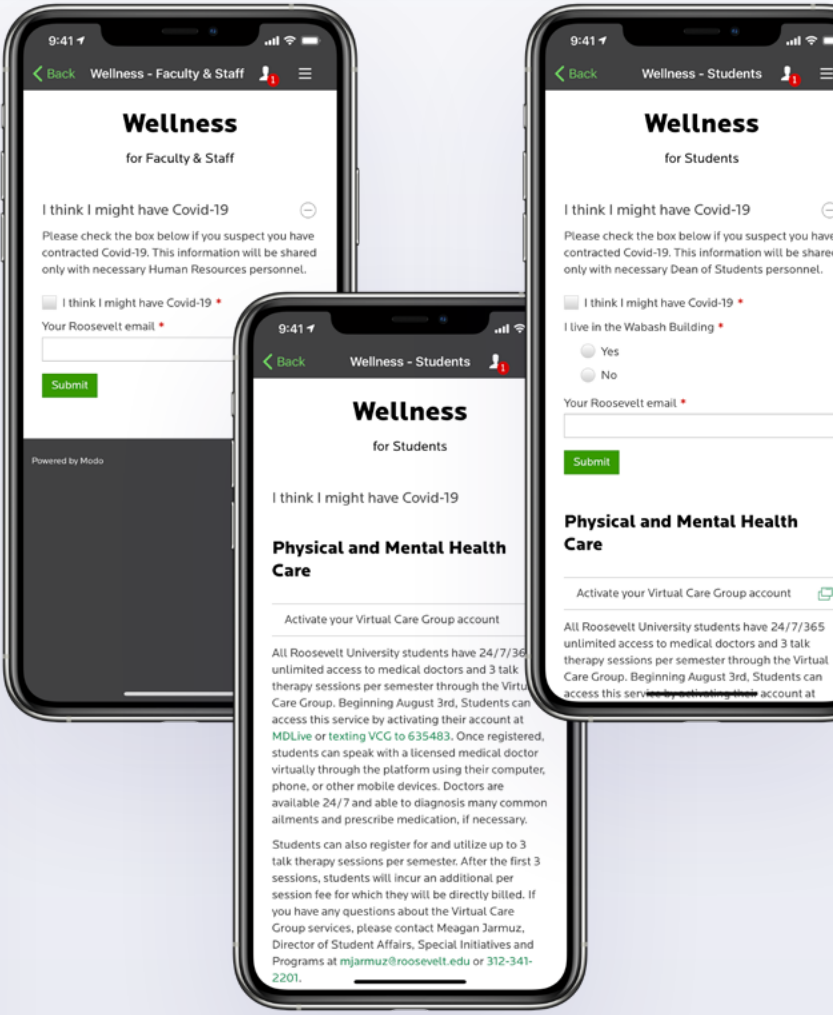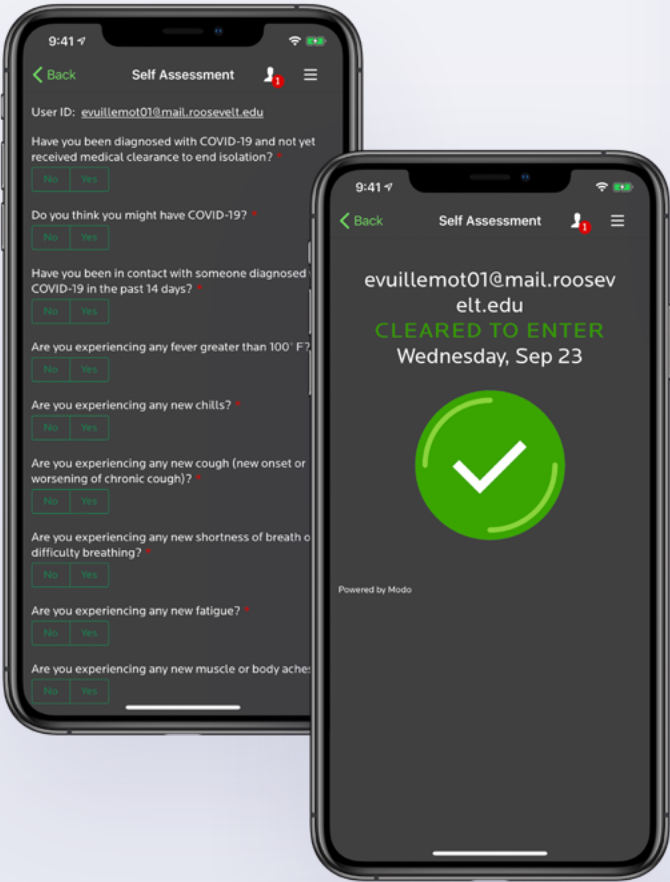
A Wellness section in the app helps students find available health services and allows both employees and students to report if they believe they have COVID-19.

An alerts and updates section of the app provides easy access to the school's COVID-19 blog and the "new normal" (customized for each Roosevelt campus).

The Return-to-Campus module provides other useful information and links, including:

Local Guidelines: Explains how students can protect themselves and others along with specific local city requirements.

Where to Eat: Shows hours and links to other eating options besides the campus cafeteria.

Getting Here: Provides guidance for parking and safely using public transportation.

Remote Work and Learning: Points to information on the school's COVID-19 blog for those learning and teaching remotely.

IT Help: Provides an option to submit a help ticket and browse the IT knowledge base.

Contact: Enables students and faculty to send a message via the app to the school's COVID-19 response team.

As new needs are identified, Roosevelt University can quickly and easily evolve its app with the no-code Modo solution.
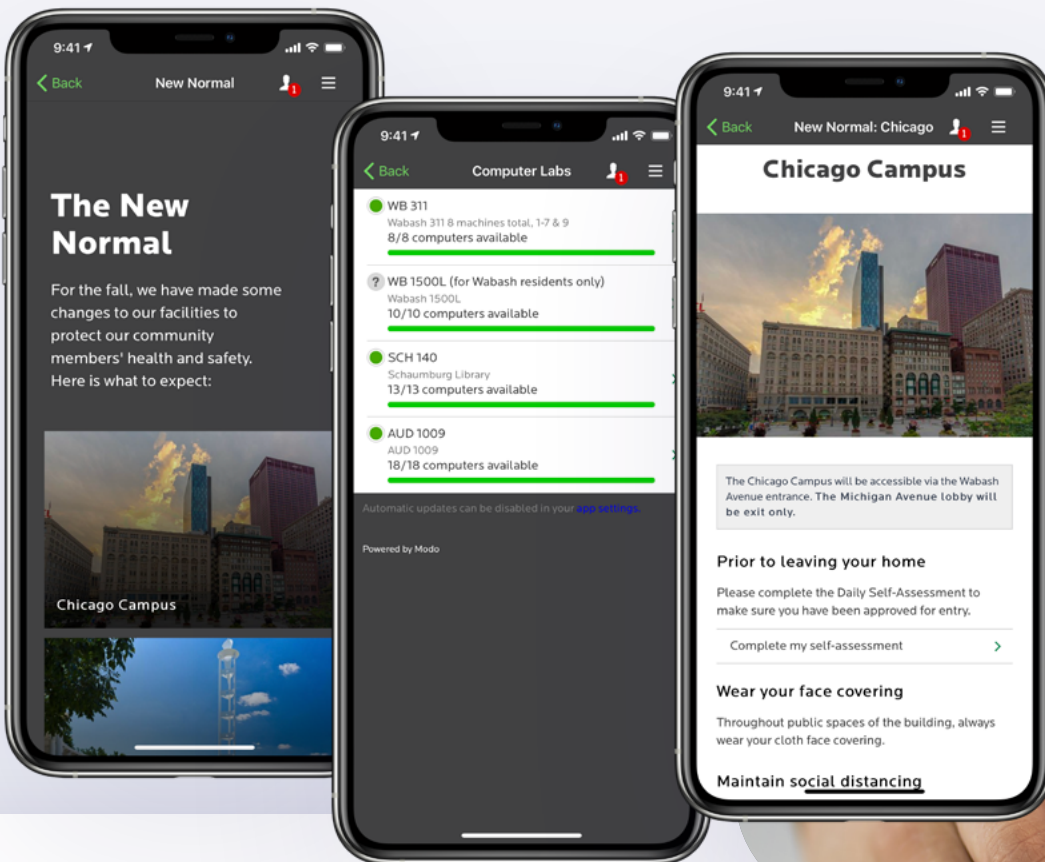
Using the Return-to-Campus app, students can also report sanitizer outages, identify socially distanced classrooms where they can study, and see which labs are open and offer available computers.

University of Houston Evolves its Mobile Strategy

To address the new normal, the University of Houston's IT and marketing teams brainstormed on how to adapt the school's existing mobile app. The following features were rolled out in a first phase in what is called the "Coog Strong" module.
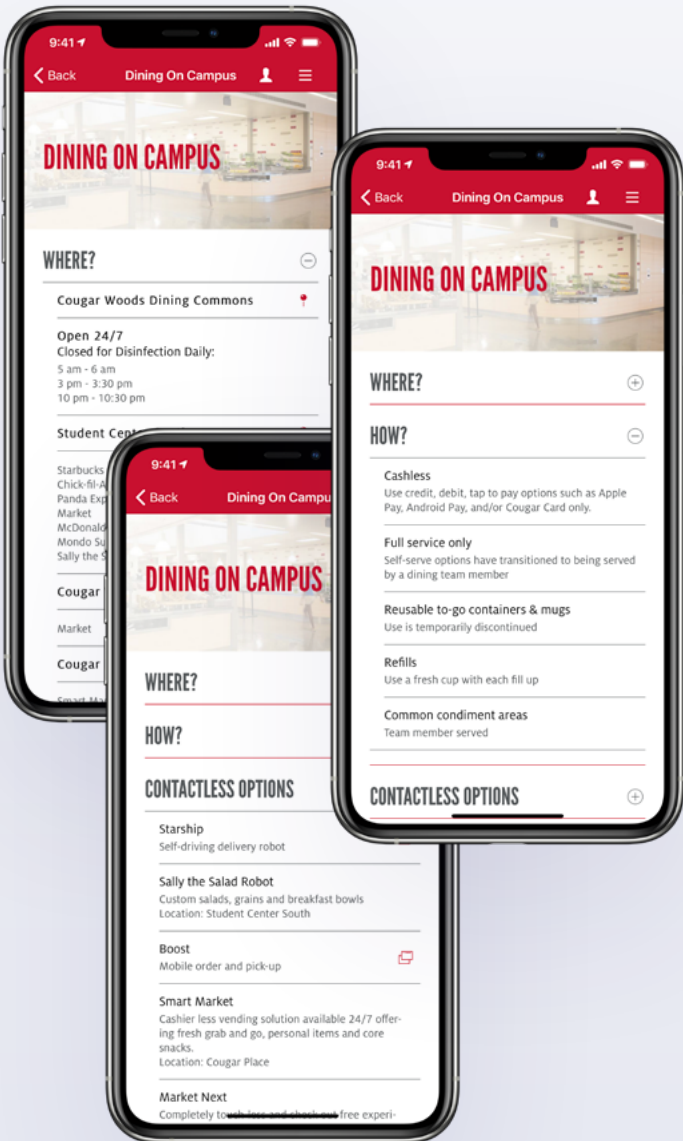
When and Where to Eat: This screen shows hours of operation for the different on-campus facilities and information about cashless options on campus. It also serves up contactless options, such as Starship delivery, enabling robotic food delivery from the convenience of a smartphone.

Push notifications based on Bluetooth beacons: As an app user enters the vicinity of campus or a building, relevant messages appear on the screen, making the notifications timely and actionable. When a user clicks on the notification, they see more information, generally reminders of how to stay safe, to wear their mask, wash their hands and social distance.

Self-assessment: A self-assessment module provides an interactive list of the symptoms everyone should check for daily before going to campus. If a user selects "no" to all symptoms, they will see a green check mark and a statement that confirms they are reporting no symptoms. The message also reminds them to follow guidelines for COVID-19, such as wearing their mask and washing their hands.

If someone selects "yes" to one or more of the symptoms, a notification confirms they are reporting symptoms. If the user is a student, the app links them to the student protocols on the university's COVID-19 website. Likewise, an employee is directed to the employee protocols on the site.

To ensure complete anonymity, the school does not keep any information about users even though they are signed into the mobile app.

Laptop checkout: In the past, the university's students would need to find the right website to reserve a laptop, but can now do so with a tap in the UH Go app. The school added a button to its app screen that a user can quickly complete. Initially, about 10% of laptops were being checked out. Since the module launched, that number has reached 100%.

Density information: To keep students and employees informed about the population density of buildings and floors, the school integrated its mobile app with Aruba's AirWave API and are able to display real-time population levels in specific campus areas. Originally the university planned to use colors to represent the population density based on this WiFi access point data overlaid with density information on a campus map. However, not wanting to risk that people might misunderstand what the colors represented, the school opted for a text-based version that shows density percentage and capacity level, along with icons to represent the different levels.

Emergency alerts: The university uses Everbridge for its emergency management system, and distributes Everbridge alerts via appropriate communication channels, including its mobile app.

When the university's emergency group flags a message as "no emergency" or indicates the emergency has been resolved, the campus app removes those messages in the messaging center.

The University of Houston has added many app features to help address COVID-19 and enable distributed learning. At the same time, it's adding features that will continue to provide value well after COVID-19, such as a classroom support call button for faculty and staff, laptop checkout, density information, and contactless food ordering.

Plan for the New Normal Now

For students, faculty and staff on campus, the mobile apps and capabilities described in this guide are table stakes. Even if your constituents are not on campus today, your school needs a plan for the new normal before people return.

Remember: While your school can enable a safe return to campus by deploying a mobile app or extending your existing one, the app should also be the cornerstone of your strategy for supporting the student experience beyond campus. With a well-considered plan, your school's mobile app can become an essential tool for connecting with and engaging your students in important areas outside of the classroom. Think of your app as a conduit to discovering everything from school clubs, food options, and campus safety to exploring the local area, taking time for health and wellness, and finding opportunities for leadership and volunteerism.

Be ready for whatever may come your school's way with Modo Campus, a no-code app building solution that makes it easy for anyone -- regardless of technical skill — to create a personalized and unified campus app.

MODO.

100 Cambridgepark Drive
Suite 200
Cambridge, MA 02140

✉ communications@modolabs.com

📞 1 (866) 391-6636 (MODO)

🌐 www.modolabs.com

🐦 @modolabs

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