



# UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI ADAPTS ITS MOBILE APP

to Enable a Successful Experience  
for Students Before, During,  
and After Orientation

**“By enhancing our existing MODO-powered mobile campus app to deliver a virtual NSO experience, we gain the potential to engage students the entire time they’re at our university.”**

**—Laura Laughlin, Director of the Office  
of Orientation and Transition Programs,  
University of Southern Mississippi**

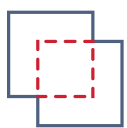
Founded in 1910, The University of Southern Mississippi (Southern Miss) is a public institution with undergraduate enrollment of nearly 12,000. It offers approximately 189 programs leading to baccalaureate, master’s, specialist, and doctorate degrees, along with more than 280 student organizations. Southern Miss ranked in the 2020 edition of Best Colleges is National Universities.

Every higher education institution understands the importance of the New Student Orientation (NSO) experience in setting the stage for a successful first-year experience and beyond. However, the NSO



experience takes on new meaning during a global pandemic that has interrupted the typical routine across most college campuses. Southern Miss gracefully addressed the issue by enabling a virtual NSO experience via its iSouthernMS mobile application.

## REIMAGINING THE NSO EXPERIENCE



**Southern Miss will accommodate students by offering classes in face-to-face, hybrid and online formats in fall 2020.**

Since it can't expect all incoming freshmen to be on campus, it had to plan accordingly for its NSO by enabling a virtual experience. Fortunately it had already launched its iSouthernMS mobile application so it could communicate with students throughout the regular academic term. Now it was a matter of figuring out how to deliver NSO via the app.

The university knew content consumption by students and their families would be more time distributed and asynchronous. Rather than a captive audience of students gathered for campus tours and talks, Southern Miss would be uploading content that students and families would consume at their convenience. While the school could deliver videos, PowerPoint presentations, and even live sessions via its mobile app, there was no guarantee people would tune in or pay attention.

Even before COVID hit, Southern Miss had intended to house all its orientation information and agendas inside its mobile app. It had also started thinking about how it could succinctly and effectively communicate with students, both during and beyond orientation throughout their years on campus.

Southern Miss was able to achieve all its goals by making its mobile app the heart of its pre-orientation, NSO, and post-orientation experience.



## BUILDING UPON ITS MODO-ENABLED MOBILE APP

The university decided to make its mobile app the first touch point during orientation. Doing so meant students and family members would get comfortable with the app, allowing the school to communicate easily with students and their families beyond the orientation agenda.

Southern Miss updated its mobile app to showcase things new students should do before, during, and after orientation, while highlighting the information fair – the main component of the virtual NSO experience.



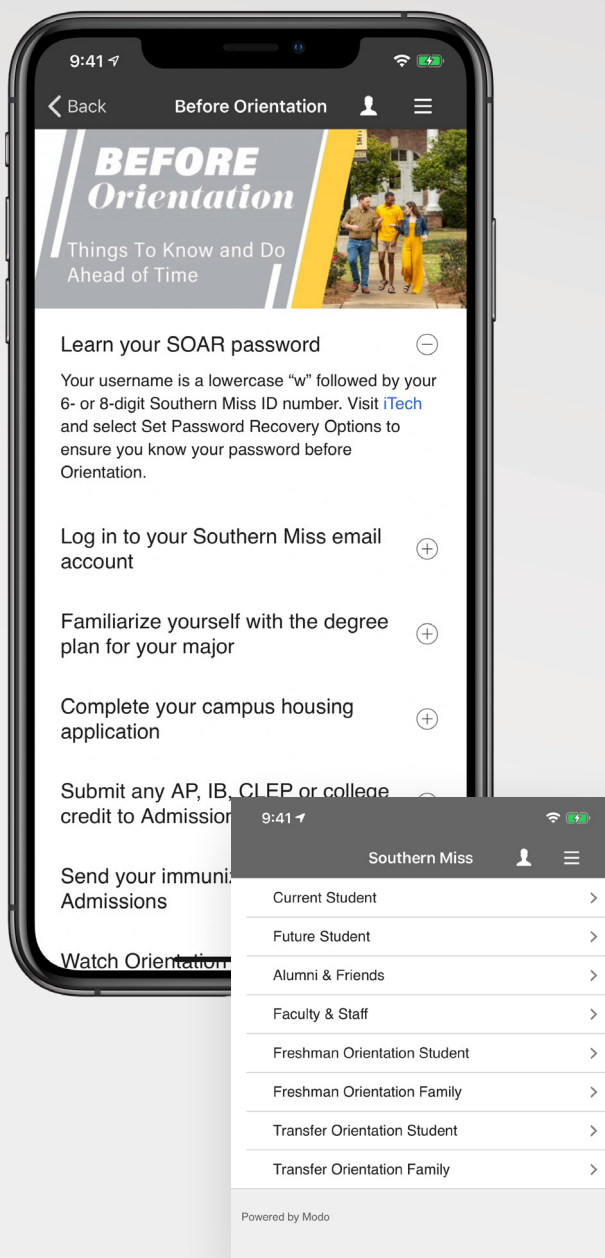
## KICKING OFF BEFORE ORIENTATION

Two weeks prior to one-day orientation sessions scheduled for July, incoming students began receiving a series of communications via their USM email accounts and personal email accounts. The emails pointed students to content on the university's website. As the sessions drew near, orientation leaders contacted students by phone and text messages.

At the same time, academic advisors reached out to students to engage them in extensive pre-course registration work in the two weeks prior to the virtual orientation session. The goal was making sure students understood their degree plan, were choosing classes for first semester, and thinking about how to fit them into their schedule.

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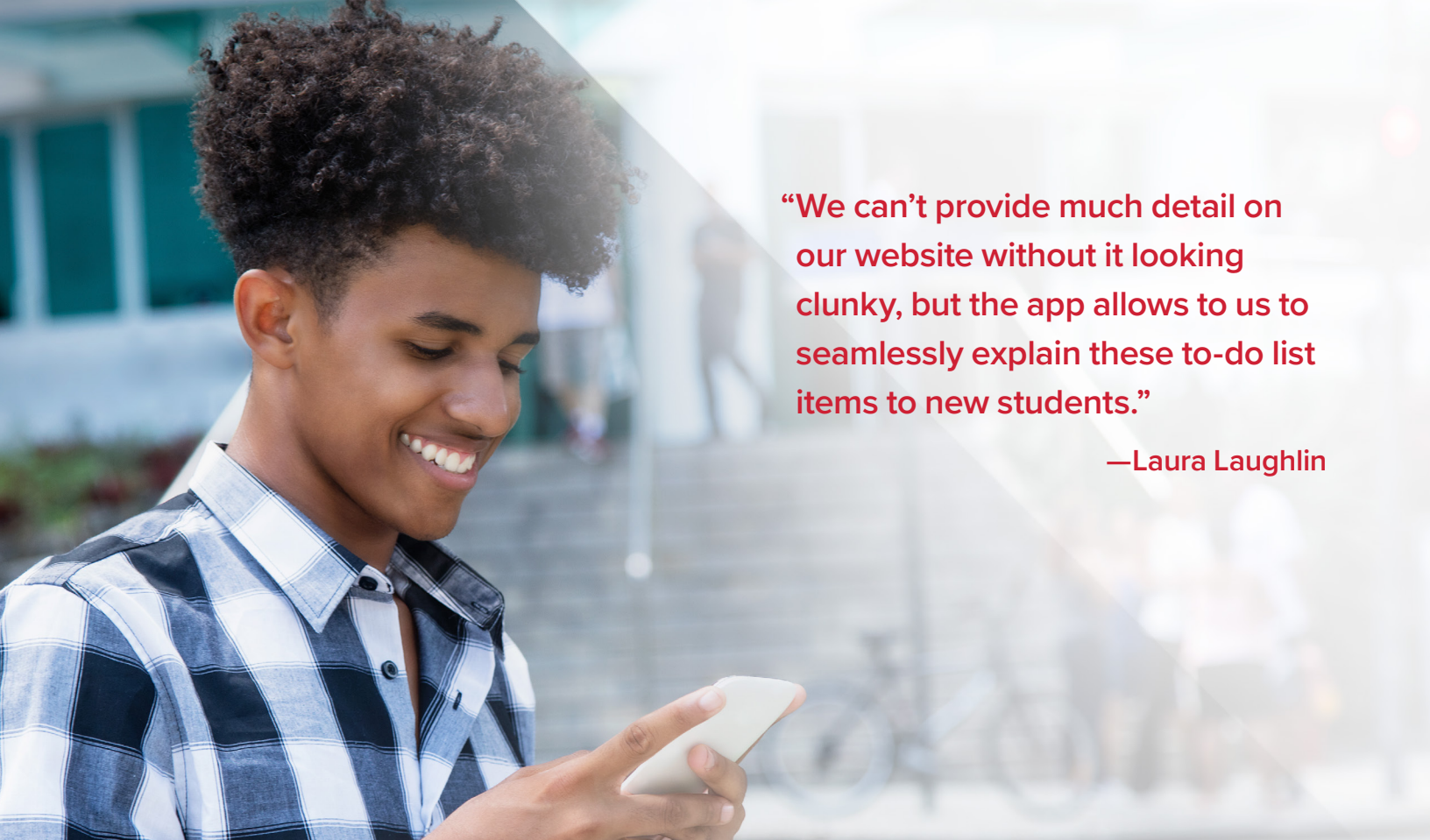


## PROVIDING A NATURAL FLOW FOR STUDENTS

Once on the website, the first thing students and their families see is information about the iSouthernMS mobile app. While the school wants students and their families to download the app, it maintains the same content on its website and in the app to accommodate those without access to a smartphone. At the same time, the app visually mimics the information that students have already received from the university.

“We think it’s important that that flow makes sense to the student regardless of which office creates the content. In the app, students see the same images and designs on the information they’ve received from specific university offices and see on that office’s section of the website,” explains Laura Laughlin, Director of the Office of Orientation and Transition Programs for Southern Miss.

Once they’ve downloaded the app, students select the Freshman Orientation Student persona from the initial menu. Other orientation personas include Freshman Family, Transfer Orientation Student, and Transfer Orientation Family. Different personas make it possible for the university to deliver customized content and notifications to these specific groups of people.



**“We can’t provide much detail on our website without it looking clunky, but the app allows to us to seamlessly explain these to-do list items to new students.”**

**—Laura Laughlin**

## **GUIDING STUDENTS THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE**

The NSO home screen in the app shows content split out by before orientation, during orientation, and after orientation. When students select the before, during, and after options, they are taken to a style page where they can expand any of the items.

The before orientation checklist is designed to make sure students take care of final enrollment to-dos that they’ve been informed about via email and mail. These include activities like learning their portal passwords, familiarizing themselves with their degree plans, and watching orientation presentations.

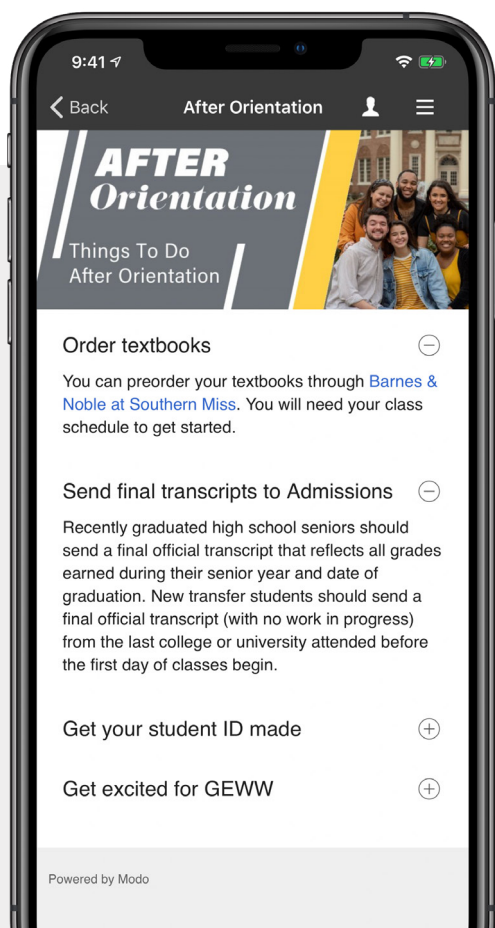
Offices across campus have contributed to the 30 or so videos associated with the information fair. “Presenting videos via the app gives us the opportunity to mimic the experience students and families have when walking around at our on-campus information fair. It also allows them to get an elevator pitch from whichever office they are interested in,” says Laughlin.

Well-designed icons make the orientation pages visually appealing and link to YouTube videos that students can watch at their own pace prior to their orientation session. This includes presentations of 15 to 20 minutes and detailed information a student would receive during an in-person orientation.

## ENSURING SUCCESS ON ORIENTATION DAY AND BEYOND

On their virtual orientation day, students finalize their schedules during a formal academic advising appointment. Students also learn more about what it means to be a member of the college, expectations of them moving forward, and what they could expect classes to be like.

“It was important that the virtual orientation experience not be burdensome to students who might not have easy access to technology,” explains Laughlin. To that end, the school limited sessions to a small group of about 10 new students with their orientation leader that occur from 8:30 am to 10:00 am.



The iSouthernMS mobile app also includes a post-orientation checklist, covering tasks that students need to take care of after orientation. This includes things like taking their fall class schedule to Barnes and Noble to order textbooks. It also covers tasks like sending final transcripts to the office of admissions, which students can do directly in the app.

## STARTING A LIFETIME CONNECTION WITH FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

The app will accompany students through their entire time at the university. Once through orientation, the app takes them to the Golden Eagle Welcome Week persona. This extended orientation program allows students to acclimate to campus and to Hattiesburg before starting classes. During the week, students have the opportunity to experience the Painting

**The iSouthernMS mobile app also includes a post-orientation checklist, covering tasks that students need to take care of after orientation.**



of the Eagle Walk, find their classes, attend an involvement fair, and showcase their skills at the Got Talent show!

Students are then transitioned into their new student and retention program persona on the app. This persona delivers information students need to get through their first year. Then students are moved to the current student persona, with access to all resources and information needed to succeed at Southern Miss. Finally, they are transitioned to the Alumni and Friends persona.

In a parallel track, families of new students select the Orientation Family persona to access information related to their student's orientation experience. Families are then graduated to the Family program persona, through which they can stay abreast of their students' experience at the school and receive messages from the university about how they can support their students beyond just the orientation experience. Finally parents are transitioned to the Alumni and Friends persona.

To learn how Modo can help your mobile campus engagement soar, visit [modolabs.com/campus](http://modolabs.com/campus).

**“We want the NSO experience to be the start of a lifelong connection with our students, and via our mobile app, we are able to carry out that mission even as we shift to virtual orientation.”**

—Laura Laughlin, Director of the Office of Orientation and Transition Programs, University of Southern Mississippi



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