

## CASE STUDY

# Timely Implementation of Call-back Queue System Safely Manages Student Services



## Overview

As a polytechnic institute, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) experiences year round enrollment dates, with programs starting throughout the year. With multiple campuses across Calgary, they have over 30,000 students enrolled at any time. Due to these rolling enrolment dates, they also have a constant influx of potential students. Consistently the year, these potential students are looking for program information and want to connect with real members of the academic departments.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the school's Office of the Registrar was experiencing between 100 and 150 calls per day from students and prospective students. When the pandemic hit, they realized that they would need to cancel all in-person classes and close their campuses. They also needed an immediate solution to manage these calls. With campuses closed and many unknowns about the next few months of programs, the office experienced a 47 percent increase of calls from concerned students. They needed a way to help all these students efficiently. That's why, when they received an email about virtual call-back queues from QLess, they knew they needed to implement this system quickly. Within four days, the team was working remotely and the virtual call-back queue was up and running.



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— Scott Robinson

## Business Challenge

Colleges and universities around the globe began closing their campuses in mid-March to protect staff and students from the coronavirus. SAIT was preparing for the closure, but were unsure how to transition to remote working—especially for those who dealt directly with students and prospects. They knew that student services calls would likely increase due to these unprecedented circumstances, as students would be worried and want to know what was happening with their education.

Before the pandemic, students were unable to make appointments with the registrar's office. They would have to show up, join the queue and wait. Throughout the day, the lines wouldn't stop. During peak times or periods of fewer staff, students could be waiting for hours to be seen. When preparing for the closure of campuses, SAIT knew that without face-to-face meetings, the number of calls they received, which was usually around 100 calls a day, could increase. They needed a digital solution that would let them help students efficiently, and that could be implemented immediately to prepare for the closure.

“The lines don't stop during the day, especially during peak times,” said Scott Robinson, Associate Registrar. “Because of that, we've had to constantly monitor and manage how many employees are in the office, available to help. Lunch times, break time—they all have to be adjusted to help with these longer lines.”

## Solution

Virtual call-back queues by QLess represented the perfect solution for SAIT. After alerting the team at the registrar's office, a quick decision was made to implement the system. Within four days, staff were working remotely and the virtual system was in place. All that SAIT needed to do was to equip their employees with cell phones to manage the calls.

The solution has had many immediate benefits, including increased staff and student satisfaction. “The experience has been fantastic,” said Robinson. “The staff love it and the students are no longer complaining about the length of the wait times.”

Staff have also noticed an immediate increase in the quality of calls they were getting. Typically, they would receive many calls throughout the day that were for other departments. The QLess system helped them filter through the calls that were not for them. Now, the people entering the callback queue are real leads with specific needs. These included current or prospective students with questions or concerns that could be handled directly by the registrar's office.

## Results

If there is a benefit to be seen from the pandemic, it could be how it has forced people and businesses to challenge traditional methods to achieve their goals. Before the pandemic, SAIT had looked into implementing a digital solution to leverage their call center system, but were worried about managing real-time calls alongside messages that needed to be returned. Their experience with QLess has shown them that virtual call-back queues have actually helped them. “Despite what we anticipated, the call-back queue doesn't bog us down. It has actually helped us be more efficient,” said Robinson.

With call volumes increasing by over 47 percent, the call back queue has enabled the registrar's office to serve a higher volume of students per day. By using a call-back queue, if someone does not answer or if that person hangs up, staff are no longer left waiting and can simply move onto the next person. The office has experienced a higher throughput of relevant calls, but has managed to increase the number of students served in a day from 97 students to 151. Staff have been impressed with the specific nature of the calls coming in. Before implementing QLess, they would have many student requests come through that weren't for their department. Having to field these calls and connect callers with the appropriate department would take up valuable time that could be spent on relevant requests. With QLess, they have noticed a steep drop in calls that are not specifically for their department, which has helped them serve students effectively. Students have adjusted to the call back service, citing that they're happy to receive updates on their wait times and appreciative that they don't have to wait on the line.

As the pandemic rapidly changes, plans for higher education institutes are constantly evolving. With QLess, SAIT is confident that they can manage the uncertainty, while helping concerned students and prospects efficiently. “We don't know how the future will play out,” said Scott, “ But we do know that we will need to continue integrating these digital solutions into our everyday services in the future.”

