

# Texas A&M leverages AI chatbot to engage students

Ivy.ai's Live Chat feature provides extra support during COVID-19 restrictions

**T**exas A&M students who need career center information can count on a certain (digital) Rough Collie who's smart, fast and loyal. Resembling the school mascot, the center's artificial intelligence chatbot even shares some of its traits: It never strays from its home, it's always happy to see students and it responds instantly when summoned.

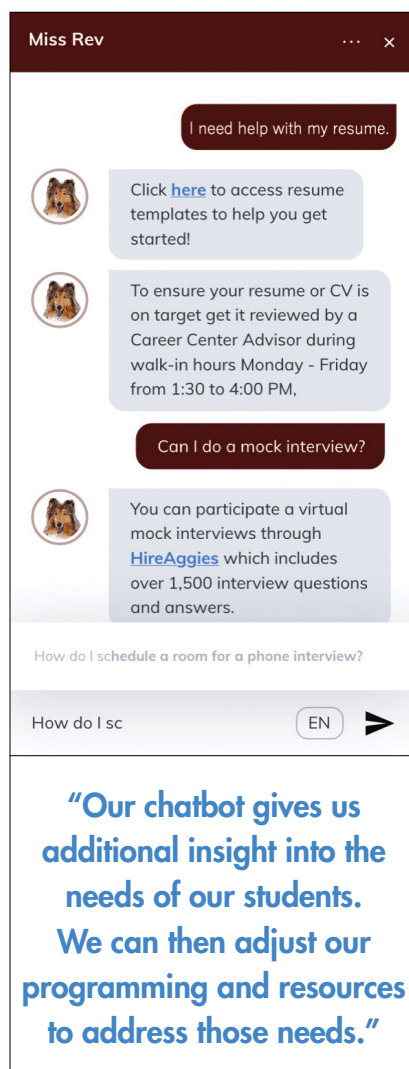
To reach the conversational agent developed by Ivy.ai, students type in a question or keyword, or click on a topic in the chat window. The chatbot, whose fluffy face is pictured near each response, provides answers as well as links or prepopulated topics to click for additional information.

"Our career center site is large and has a lot of content," says Executive Director Samantha Wilson. "We implemented the chatbot to educate students and encourage them to visit, interact and engage further in the resources and tools we have."

## Keeping information current

The bot delivers answers with help from a human-supervised machine learning algorithm. Its knowledge base stays current and grows with the bot's daily website crawl and staff-added information—such as answers to missed questions.

Implemented by the career center's technology committee in January 2019, the chatbot has had more than 14,300 conversations between mid-August 2019 and mid-May 2020. Abdullah Abdul Kader, senior career coordinator and the technology committee's chair, reports



that, during the same period, more than 10,600 questions or messages were submitted, and users clicked prepopulated topics during a chat approximately 22,400 times. In

addition, career center staff had more than 20,300 advising contacts with students through appointments, open office hours, calls and emails, which continued a trend of increasing contacts over recent years.

## Interdepartmental collaboration between bots

Texas A&M University, which has more than 65,000 students on its College Station campus and satellites, has been using chatbots from Ivy.ai in the financial aid, registrar, career services, and student success offices, with three more on deck.

The bots can communicate with one another, allowing them to respond to questions that are not specific to their department. They also offer multiple languages, SMS Texting, Live Chat, video tutorials, conversational form collection and integrations with student information systems.

## Interaction during pandemic

"We launched 'Live Chat' during COVID-19," Wilson says. "It provided another avenue of support for students, who could go onto the website and have immediate interactions. Students who used this feature found it very helpful."

Also useful is the chatbot's ability to highlight trends and identify popular topics or new questions.

"Our chatbot gives us additional insight into the needs of our students," Wilson says. "We can then adjust our programming and resources to address those needs."