DESCRIPTION & RATIONALE

The AMS SSM and Tutoring leadership team have undertaken work in researching and exploring options to replace a formerly used external software application called Helphub for the private tutoring. The application and contract with this vendor was discontinued in December 2018 for various reasons reported to AMS Council. Since then, the AMS Tutoring program, a Service within the AMS Services offices, has been working on an ad-hoc, manual process of connecting UBC students with AMS tutors.

This proposal was approved by the AMS IT Committee at its meeting on November 7th, 2019, then by the Finance Committee at its meeting on November 20th, 2019, and is now being submitted to AMS Council to consider the following motion:

BIRT that the AMS Student Services budget 2019-2020 be amended to re-allocate $15,000 from account 147-7010-00 to 144-7219-00 in order to approve an expenditure to execute an agreement between Nimbus Tutoring Inc. & The Alma Mater Society of UBC for a software license to be used by AMS Services.
October 9, 2019

To: Information Technology Committee (ITC)
From: Ian Stone (AMS Student Services Manager), Nikol Grishin (AMS Tutoring Coordinator)
Re: IT Project Proposal – Tutoring Mobile/Web application

AMS Tutoring is one of the 7 services that exists under the AMS Services portfolio. As currently mandated, it provides two main Services: group tutoring, which is free and mainly caters to groups of first and second year students; and appointment tutoring, which is a paid service that caters to a wider group of students through a wider range of courses offered. Over the past few years, we have seen the number of appointments through private tutoring stagnate at around 225-250 appointments per year, and one of the main reasons for this is capacity of our two part-time staff that are responsible for Tutoring. Without a streamlined way to match potential clients to tutors, setting up private appointments like this requires that the Tutoring Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator spend a significant amount of time e-mailing back and forth to set up these appointments. On top of this, while tutors are thoroughly interviewed and trained on not only tutoring practices as well as AMS policies, issues relating to disagreement on pay, cancelations, and length of sessions are bound to come up. Without ways to efficiently monitor and control more of these factors (as it is simply not feasible for this to be done by two part-time staff), AMS Tutoring cannot grow without an investment in a platform that simplifies the tasks required of AMS Tutoring staff. It is within this context that the Services Team, spearheaded by the Senior Manager, Student Services is exploring the use of software to help with the following issues:

- Clients cannot easily see who is available to book for private appointments;
- Initial communication to set up a private appointment is tedious and inefficient, and further communication cannot easily be monitored;
- Problem resolution (ex. Disagreement on the amount of time a service is provided) is an additional task that consumes much of the AMS Tutoring team’s time;
- Collecting demographic data and feedback from clients on the service provided is messy, inconsistent, and not easily analyzable;

Ultimately, if AMS Tutoring wishes to expand capacity, acquiring software that helps to solve above issues and streamline the processes of expanding our reach, recruiting potential new tutors, matching clients to those who can meet their needs, and collecting good data to properly inform decision making are all required. Thus, I hope that the IT Committee can consider the acquisition of software proposed as a valuable investment in the longevity of our Service, and the AMS as a whole.

Over the past 2 years, the previous and current Student Services Manager, Tutoring Coordinator/Assistant Coordinator, and Senior Manager, Student Services have done an in-depth review of several potential options that would help address the needs outlined above. These options can be generally categorized into two: primarily “scheduling” services, that were designed for other purposes (ex. Scheduling appointments in a dentist’s office) and can be used for our purposes; and primarily “tutoring-specific” services, which were designed with tutoring services in mind.

Because the aim of this IT project is not simply to implement a Band-Aid solution, but to genuinely grow AMS Tutoring into a long-term sustainable service, we have primarily focused on this second category of platforms. Within this second category, the Services team have reviewed two applications: Proov and Nimbus.
After much discussion and multiple online and in-person demos, we have unanimously agreed that Nimbus is the preferred option for many reasons, including the following:

- Almost all of the features that we have identified as necessary for any application that we choose to move forward with have already been implemented in the software, and any further requests that we have for changes would be at no extra cost.
- With offices and servers located in Canada, the AMS would be able to easily follow our data privacy guidelines. This is also very important for customer service and obtaining support for any technical issues that are bound to come up, due to little different in time zones and a better understanding of the Canadian context of our service.
- One of the primary reasons we are exploring the use of an app is to reduce the significant amount of time that the Tutoring Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator spend e-mailing clients and tutors back and forth. Nimbus comes with a chat function that allows clients to arrange all logistics related to their appointment, while still allowing us to monitor any issues.
- Nimbus has a very secure and efficient system for payment processing, appointment confirmation, and appointment timing dispute resolution. Nimbus would help with the risk associated with cash payments, and quicken any issues that would come up with regards to cancelations and refunds.
- With data-driven decision making is a key priority for AMS Services and the AMS as a whole, Nimbus’s admin side captures and displays a significant amount of data that will allow us to better track who, why, and when is using our Service, enabling us to better meet the needs of students on campus and grow in the long-term.

In addition to these core requirements, Nimbus is currently piloting some interesting new ideas that could potentially allow us to use a re-tooled version of their software for our Services that provide private appointments (namely Vice and Speakeasy). Thus, while the software itself has been identified as a promising long-term solution to most of the issues that we currently face, the company itself as appears to be a viable long-term partner for the growth of AMS Services in general.

If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns, please reach out to Ian Stone, Student Services Manager at services@ams.ubc.ca; Nikol Grishin at tutoring@ams.ubc.ca; or Faraz Kazi at tutoringassistant@ams.ubc.ca. Thank you for your consideration.

Ian Stone, Student Services Manager
Nikol Grishin, AMS Tutoring Coordinator
Schedule of Implementation

Week 1

1-hour meeting Exec meeting:

Overarching structure
- Tutor interviewing responsibilities
- Subsidy and discount budget
- Split into multiple sub-organizations (faculties, clubs, campuses)

Technical parameters of program
- Price range available to be set by tutors
- Customer support preferences (name)
- Courses and locations to input
- Determination of cancellation policy parameters
- Admin accounts with login information (phone number, emails, administrator names)

Branding of interface
- Colors to be used on tutor/student interface (banner, buttons)
- Logo(s) choice and placement (icon, banner)
- Cover photo (university selection, home page, profile page)

Week 2

Program Lead 1-hour meeting:
Working with lead executive, staff member, or volunteer in charge of tutoring program
- Admin console overview
- Tutor interview training

Week 2 or 3

Marketing Team 30-minute meeting:
Developing a marketing plan with Tutoring Program coordinator, as well as staff and executives
- Email
- On-ground
- Social media
- In-app
- Events

Week 3 and beyond

Launch, tutor recruitment, and growth, ~30-minute meeting every 2-4 weeks:
- Initial focus on tutor recruitment and interviewing
- Remainder focused on promotion of the program, maintenance, desired upgrades, etc.
Helping student unions increase student engagement and success by offering technology-driven academic tutoring, mentoring, and counselling solutions.
Increased demand for student support

- Since 2000, Canadian post-secondary institutions have seen their enrollments increase by 35%
- Rising student enrollment rate has led to a need for better student support services

Growing mental health crisis is closely linked to academics

- 500% growth in students disclosing mental health issues to their university
- 92% of students in counselling report having problems with academic work

Technology-driven services

- 82% of students would be more satisfied if their university managed services digitally
What is the common thread?
Investing in student services fuels student success.
What have we learned about the AMS?

Key learning #1:
- “Promoting high quality student learning” is a core value of the union.

Key learning #2:
- According to a 2018 Macleans article 1 in 4 students at UBC will not graduate.

Key learning #3:
- AMS Tutoring is the central tutoring program for students at UBC.

Key learning #4:
- Seeking to invest in software solutions for current tutoring program.
The problem with current student services

Coordination
- Manually scheduling over email is time consuming and an unpleasant experience for students, tutors, and staff

Analytics
- Existing solutions lack data collection methods which means that unions are limited when improving services for students

Academic Services
- More than 40% of student dropouts are due to academic performance. Investing in tutoring has been proven to improve academic wellbeing and raise GPA by 15-25%

AMS SERVICES
Automate your booking processes to reduce administrative workload by up to 75%.

Build technology-driven academic tutoring programs to lower student dropout and increase student wellness.

Increase students’ grades by 15-25% and promote students’ engagement with each other and with the union.
Modernize academic tutoring programs

Improve mentorship programs

...and other services like counselling

Through a custom, union-branded mobile app

Reduces administrative and teaching workload

Collects analytics to improve services

Seamless experience for students & staff
Learn more about your tutor and see reviews from other students
Filter out and select the best tutor for you
Find a course you would like help in
Book a time and add it to your calendar

How we do it - Branded Mobile Application
Select a location at your university

Provide some info for your tutor

Confirm the request and head to your lesson

Leave feedback on your session

How we do it - Branded Mobile Application
How we do it - Administration Dashboard

Specific Data
- Track what type of help students are seeking the most

Trends
- Understand and prepare for peak periods

Communication Channels
- Send notifications and emails to users for greater engagement

*We include support for fee-based AND non-fee based services
Easy to implement, simple to manage

Training and Support
We provide training and 24/7 support to make your implementation a success.

Swift Implementation
Have your program up and running in as little as 2 weeks.

Marketing Support
Our graphics team helps design union-branded marketing materials to promote the service.
Some of our partners
“Together with the amazing team at Nimbus, our program launch was a big success! The fact that students can book and pay tutors all in one app makes tutoring just a click away. I’m very satisfied with our partnership with Nimbus, and I highly recommend their services!” - Patrick Arevalo, UMSU Peer Tutoring Coordinator
“Nimbus has made teaching a seamless and hassle-free process. The platform is user-friendly and I love the flexibility that comes with it... Most of all, I very much appreciate the dedicated and friendly support that I constantly receive from the Nimbus team should I need any help.” - Pierre Shenouda, Tutor
“The rating system and the convenience of the Nimbus app gave me confidence in the tutors. After my first session, I used it every time before a midterm or final. I hope Nimbus can continue to help organizations provide programs that help students succeed.”

- Oscar Aidan, Student
97% of students who book with our software give reviews of 4.5 out of 5 stars or higher.

Thank you!

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