

# Proposal to Overhaul the Android Version of the MyState App

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# Background

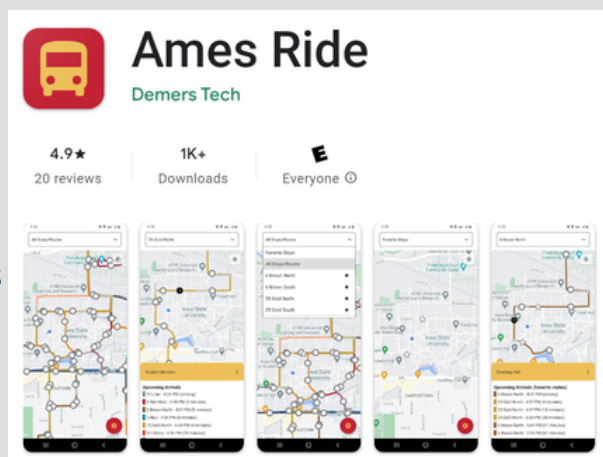
The MyState app, Iowa State’s “Ultimate Student Toolkit” (“MyState,” Iowa State University), was designed to make students’ lives easier. It offers a variety of functions, such as access to class schedules, bus routes, dining center menus, and more. A large portion of Iowa State students have this app downloaded on their phones, and many of them use the app to help them get to class on time, decide where to eat, find out which employers are attending career fairs, and so on.

Even though many students rely on this app—the Android version alone has over ten thousand downloads—, it is riddled with issues that cause it to fall short of its tagline goal, becoming more of a hindrance than a help. On Android, the MyState app sits at a measly 2 stars out of 5. Reviews indicate that “dining doesn’t work,” there is “awful Cyride tracking,” and even “constant crashing” that makes the app “nearly unusable” (“Mystate - Apps on Google Play”).

The iOS version of MyState has its fair share of problems as well, but based on reviews, it is much more stable than its Android counterpart, and most users are on Android anyway (71 reviews on the App Store vs. 427 on the Play Store.) (“Mystate - Apps on Google Play”; Iowa State University of Science and Technology). With that in mind, this proposal will be centered around the Android version of the MyState app.

I’ve had many of my own difficulties in using this app. One incident occurred when I was trying to prepare for my first career fair in my freshman year. I went to the events tab in MyState, which is supposed to display a comprehensive list of employers in attendance, but found that the list selection filters were broken. This made it nearly impossible to find the employers I was looking for. Instead, I had to text friends throughout the day to scroll through the lists on their iPhones and send me screenshots, which was far from practical.

In the past, there have been great strides in filling the gaps left by MyState’s current bugs. One excellent example is the Ames Ride app, developed entirely by Patrick Demer, a now-graduated Software Engineer from Iowa State. Using the same data that the MyState app relies on for bus routes, he was able to develop his own intuitive mobile app from scratch, providing students with fast, reliable information about how to best navigate campus (McClellan). His app currently sits at 4.9 stars out of 5 (“Ames Ride - Apps on Google Play”).



Patrick Demer's Ames Ride app (“Ames Ride - Apps on Google Play”)

All of this is to say that MyState, despite what it strives to be, is falling short. Students are frustrated by its current build and find more annoyance in using it than convenience. Even so, there is hope on the horizon. If the university takes time to gather input from the students who would benefit most from a functioning version of the app and puts driven students like Patrick Demer in charge of development, then the MyState app could finally become the ultimate student toolkit it was always meant to be.

# Objectives

This proposal will lay out a comprehensive plan that, when implemented by Iowa State University, will gather general functionality issues from users of MyState on Android through campus-wide email surveys. This data will be used to develop updates with usability testing being conducted after each update. The updating and usability testing process will continue for 6 months or until the app performs as it should, that is, sitting above at least 3.5 stars out of 5 on the Play Store.

If all of this is done correctly, the students will have an array of helpful, functional tools at their disposal, Iowa State's reputation for providing for its students will grow, and student developers will gain valuable experience in maintaining an app of professional quality.

## Plan of Work

### 1. Gather common issues from Android users of the MyState app.

- Create a survey containing multiple choice questions and short answer prompts about the app's current issues.
  - Use the reviews from the Google Play Store page for the MyState app to generate survey questions about common issues.
- Send the survey to students via campus-wide emails. This process is nothing new; many student research projects on campus also use mass emails to achieve similar results.

### 2. Use the gathered data from users to develop an initial update.

- Delegate current members of the MyState development team to work on the update.
- Enlist aspiring developers from around campus to work on the update.
  - Send out emails and put up posters to find these developers. Many people who have issues with the app might have experience coding and will be motivated to work on a solution. Posters with the message, "Do you want to improve the MyState app and gain valuable work experience in software development?" could be effective.

### 3. Conduct usability testing after the first update.

- Create a usability test that requires users to try all of the app's basic tools without external guidance from those conducting the tests. This will help determine how intuitive the app is.
- Create a schedule for the testing groups and a form for users to sign up.
- Reserve a location for the testing groups at a convenient location on campus.
- Send a campus-wide email about testing the app with a gift card incentive. Again, this will be very similar to research projects already conducted on campus, which also use gift cards to draw in participants.
- Perform the tests with groups of students. Doing these tests with multiple students simultaneously will be much more efficient than individual testing.
  - Ask testers a series of questions about the experience once it is finished.
    - Include ratings out of 10 in multiple categories, such as ease of use, visual appeal of layout, feature usefulness, etc. This will help the development team to center their efforts on what needs the most revision.

- Ask users what they would strip away. In a review of MyState, one user stated, “Doesn't even work anymore. This is what happens when you try to cram too many unnecessary features onto one app” (“Mystate - Apps on Google Play”). If users don’t need a feature, it should be removed; fewer features mean less to maintain and less for users to take issue with.

#### 4. Repeat the process of updating and usability testing as needed.

- Use the data gathered from each usability test to inform precisely what should be addressed in the next update. Conduct another usability test, rinse and repeat.

#### 5. Gather user reviews on the Play Store.

- Once usability testers are finished, ask them to review the app on the Play Store honestly.
  - After further improvements during development, follow up with testers via email to encourage them to check out the app and continue updating their review. Emphasize the value of their feedback as a primary tester.
- Continue applying step 4 until the developers feel confident that the app has been refined as much as it can be within the 6 month period.
- Send out campus-wide emails near the end of the 6 months to inform the student body of the sweeping changes and encourage them to give the updated app a look and to leave a review with their thoughts.

#### Email Campaign Summary

Many steps in this plan of work are done through mass emails. This is to the advantage of the university; the email system is already used daily for many other announcements, so no innovations or external advertisements are required. Beyond that, emails are an efficient and cost-effective way to get the word out about the MyState app overhaul. Here is a summary of the email campaign for convenience:

- Send out initial surveys. (Step 1)
- Send out advertisements to enlist aspiring developers. (Step 2)
- Send out forms for students to join the usability testing groups. (Step 3)
- Follow up with usability testers to prompt them to update their review of the app. (Step 5)
- Send out an announcement about the app’s updates to encourage students to leave a review. (Step 5)

MONTH	1				2				3				4				5				6				
WEEK	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Campus-Wide Surveys	█																								
Initial Update		█																							
Initial Usability Testing									█																
Repeating Updates/Usability Testing									█																
Gathering Reviews																									█

Gantt Chart for Plan of Work

# Evaluation

The success of this project will be evaluated mainly through the reviews of the MyState app on the Play Store. As stated, this project aims to get the app up to at least 3.5 stars out of 5. This number was chosen because of the typically slow rate of change in app ratings; 3.5 was a realistic goal for the upper limit of 6 months. The rating system also allows for explicit progress tracking. As the app is updated and users' opinions change accordingly, the reviews will slowly tick up or down.

Success will also be measured through the ratings given at the end of usability testing, explained in step 3 of the plan of work. Increased ratings in different areas of the app will indicate effective development, while decreased ratings will indicate needed improvement.

# Qualifications

The original development of the MyState app was brought forth by a partnership between the College of Engineering and the Government of the Student Body. Tyler Bell and Joshua Schroetter, who were both students attending Iowa State at the time, were responsible for developing the iOS and Android versions of the app, respectively (Castle). My point is this: the only thing that made the MyState app possible in the first place was Iowa State's willingness to support passionate students and their vision to make their peers' lives easier.

Even if MyState hasn't always lived up to expectations, I'm not going to downplay the fact that publishing it in the first place was an incredible feat. The sort of work that came from that original team is on par with applications from small, full-time software companies. So I'm not suggesting that Iowa State abandons student development or goes with an external option, like hiring a tech consultant to come in and fix the app's problems.

In fact, I think choosing external options would be a disservice to the fully capable developers here on campus. They are the ones most qualified to take on this project and learn as they do so, not just because they have talent and passion, but for this simple reason: students know students. They understand the daily rush of classes and meals and job searching and everything inbetween. They know what needs should be met by the MyState app.

Here's the bottom line: same as back in 2012 when the app was first released, if students are going to develop this app, they need the university to back them up. They need Iowa State to collaborate with them and encourage them to make this app the best that it can be. Iowa State University, in partnership with its students, is the only team qualified to give the MyState app the revamp it so desperately needs.

# Budget

	PRICE	QUANTITY	TOTAL
Student Developers	\$13.91/hr (Based on average wage for IT jobs at Iowa State.)	10 (Estimate; the university will decide how many are necessary.)	\$33384 (Based on estimate of 10 hours a week for each developer.)
Gift Cards for Usability Testing Incentive	\$10	50 - 200	\$500 - \$2000
<b>GRAND TOTAL:</b> \$33884 - \$35384			

# Benefits

If Iowa State decides to move forward with this project, a myriad of benefits will arise from it.

For one, many students' daily experiences on campus will be improved. They will have easier access to better tools that will help them make the most of their time at Iowa State, worrying less about their schedules, where to eat, when the next bus will arrive, and so on.

The project also has the natural benefit of empowering student developers by allowing them a space to better their skills and gain experience with a real and active user base. It will give them helpful practice in app design, usability testing, and many more competencies that will help them post-graduation.

The MyState overhaul is also cost-effective. Since development would be performed by students, the university would be making a worthy investment in the community without relying on expensive external consulting companies. In addition, the email campaign means that the university would spend little to nothing on marketing as well.

Finally, the university would demonstrate its commitment to students and the recognition of their needs. A polished version of the app that addresses common problems would show students that the university hears them and prioritizes what they've been asking for.

# Conclusion

Overhauling the MyState app is an essential step in meeting the daily needs of students at Iowa State. By gathering information about common issues students face while using the app, the university can hone in on what needs improvement and partner with a group of its driven and capable students to tackle these problems. By continuing to gather feedback from students throughout development by way of usability testing, they can ensure that students' voices are heard and that the development team rises to the challenges they present. When the project is finished, students will have a series of convenient and highly functional tools in the palm of their hand, knowing that their fellow students and Iowa State itself cared enough to make it happen.

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