



# Florida State University reimagines student learning with Microsoft Teams



## Leading universities are using technology to engage students

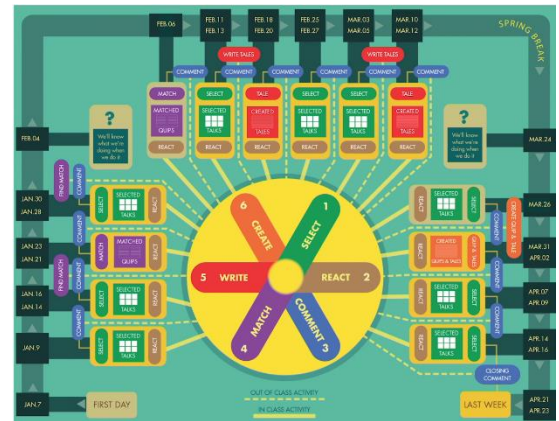
Prior to the pandemic, leading higher education institutions around the world were using technology to better engage “digital native” Generation Z students. Having grown up with devices and the Internet, students are deeply comfortable with and desire technology to be involved in every aspect of their lives. And with many students experiencing granular personalization and tailored digital engagement in retail, social media, entertainment, and many other domains, Gen Z increasingly expects their (sometimes high cost) universities to provide a similarly captivating digital experience.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, one of the country’s top public universities, Florida State University (FSU), was already transforming student engagement through technology with the Campus Reimagined Initiative. The initiative and its team are charged with innovating across the spectrum of student experience from the physical to the virtual, focusing on the idea that technology, applied correctly to personalize education and unlock the full potential of each individual, will take student engagement and learning to the next level.

## Reimagining classes: True student engagement through technology

The Campus Reimagined Initiative, led by Bill Lindner, took aim at many aspects of the student experience. But none were as important as transforming student engagement in the classroom.

“One thing I noticed was every student either has a laptop, or a handheld device. Some of them were using them, but most of them are fiddling with them. Many of the faculty members want them to turn their phones off. I [decided I] want them to turn their phones on,” Bill said. Lindner and his Campus Reimagined team brought their innovative approach to an FSU class on entrepreneurship, even starting class on a student-centered note: they planned the class around student engagement and changed the expected course syllabus into a colorful, non-linear gameboard.



[class syllabus]

Students were immediately engaged by the difference. One of the students in the class, Trey Simmons, said, “I’d say 80 to 90% of classes, the teacher says, ‘we’re going to be doing blah blah.’ Whereas in this class, we voted for the topic we were interested in and focused on learning. [Microsoft] Teams enabled this before the pandemic even happened.”

The syllabus set the tone for creating engaging student experiences with technology in every class. Lindner recorded over one-hundred, six-minute on-demand lecture sessions. In class, students used a custom app on their phone or device to vote on which lecture to watch and that day’s class content – empowering students to democratically drive their own course of study.

During lectures, students were encouraged to use their device to provide real time polling feedback. Two-way communication between instructors and students proved equally good for both, ensuring that every student fully understood critical concepts, and helping Lindner and his team finetune their lectures and technology-enhanced teaching practice. Each week, students received personalized recommendations based on their interests and goals for the course – and were prompted to engage by writing comments and recording a short video observation. The digital feedback loop enabled by Microsoft Teams and custom applications in Microsoft Power Apps led to a virtuous cycle of enhanced student engagement, critical feedback on how to improve instruction and the class, and ultimately an effective, innovative, and fun learning experience.

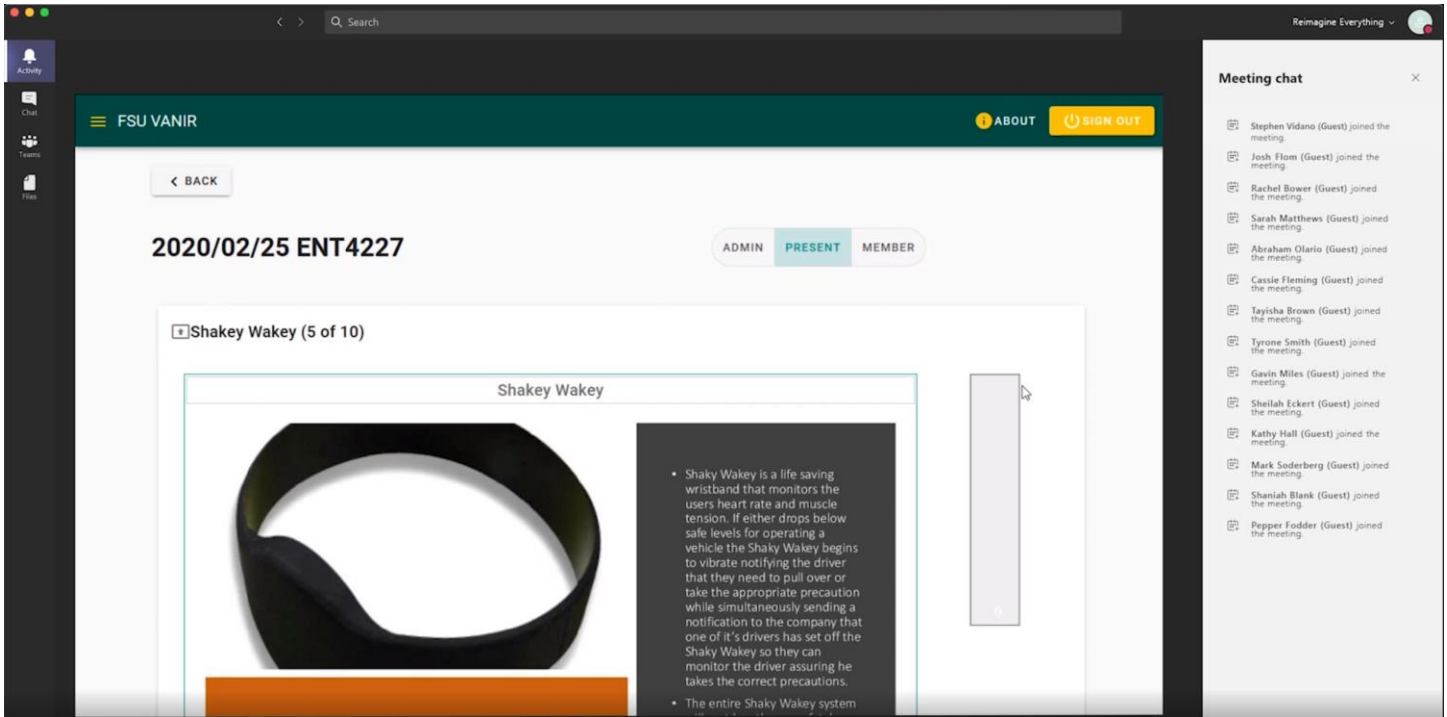
## Finding the right technology—and partner—to transform the classroom

FSU started its Campus Reimagined class with a custom-built app, but almost immediately realized they needed a more sustainable technology solution. Lindner and his team invited seventeen technology companies to pitch their education solutions. With its vision to help students achieve more, Lindner quickly knew Microsoft was the right partner. FSU started using Microsoft Teams for remote engagement, asynchronous collaboration, and to scale the Campus Reimagined efforts.

“It made just so much more sense to incorporate Teams into the class, and there’s so much more flexibility. You know, every app that you create is like recreating the wheel. With Teams, we decide what we want to do, and then we find the technology that can support that. We use Forums, Polly [a polling and survey app] and Flipgrid [a video message board app],” said Dr. Solveig Brown, Campus Reimagined’s Learning and Assessment expert with a background in cultural anthropology and corporate ethnography. “Teams created this broad palette of possibility that we can draw from and it has been a phenomenal resource.”

# A reimagined classroom and Microsoft Teams meant little disruption despite the pandemic

When the pandemic hit, FSU and Bill Lindner's entrepreneurship class were on spring break. While they did not return to campus, the class resumed and proceeded as smoothly as it ever had in person – because instructors and students alike were already familiar and comfortable with collaborating on Microsoft Teams and Microsoft 365.



After class ended, students reported little disruption and praised the online collaboration, many evaluating the class as an all-time favorite.

"When the disruption [from the pandemic] happened, you didn't know how the students were going to feel about suddenly class being 100% the Teams environment plus the custom apps we developed that are surfaced through Teams... But they loved it. We did focus groups after and students said, 'This is still my favorite class.' The thing that I noticed, is that for the students they just saw it as class -- they didn't see a big line of demarcation [from pre-pandemic to post-pandemic]. That was my proudest victory for the concept that digital support for students can be vastly increased over what it is today, and should be," said Sean Brown, Campus Reimagined's Chief Strategist.

Later, Sean reflected, "We did a lot of unreal inventing the wheel. Now, I think every educator would be surprised at how much they can do - and how easily - if they took the time to investigate the resources that are available to them inside the Microsoft digital transformation suite and inside Teams."

## What's next: Scaling and personalizing the class with data

The Campus Reimagined team is now applying lessons from their earlier classes and the pandemic to planning for 2021 and beyond. They hope to automate learning personalization and expand student involvement with technology in the classroom, whether that classroom is in-person, virtual, or a hybrid of the two. Microsoft Teams and a large suite of Microsoft and third-party education apps are built for multimodal learning experiences that help tailor any type of class for maximum student engagement and inclusivity, while empowering diverse instructors and pedagogy. And if faculty want to take tailored teaching to the next level, the learning experience can be further customized, no coding required, with Microsoft Power Apps.

Lindner said, "Nobody wants the new normal, they want the old normal. But the old normal will be slightly different. It'll be a hybrid. So, what we're trying to do now is sort out what is really going to engage students." So, to deepen student engagement, the Campus Reimagine team is looking to Microsoft's Power Platform, seamlessly integrated with the Microsoft Teams environment faculty and students already love, to identify and address specific student needs. Power Platform is solving challenges across institutions through low-to-no-code apps, Power BI is surfacing crucial student insights, and Power Automate is streamlining backend processes, further enhancing the student experience. Said Lindner, "I'm interested in a data management tool that changes the way I teach, and students learn."

"For us, the reward has been so great that I can't even imagine going back to the old way of not using technology for the students. The engagement of the students has been so high, the things we've been able to accomplish have been just amazing. So, I say be bold, give it a try. I think you'll amaze yourself at what you and your students can do," said Dr. Brown.

The Campus Reimagined initiative is leading the way for transforming the student experience at FSU. And the pandemic proved that a digitally transformed classroom can maintain student engagement and success without skipping a beat – even when in-person instruction is suddenly unfeasible. But Campus Reimagined is just getting started – as digital native students increasingly expect technology-driven personalization and paths to connect to their institution and engage in their learning, FSU will continue to innovate. "We are so excited to use even more of the Teams apps within the class to create a multimodal learning experience, to use more video so students can create a virtual presence, and to do so many more things – we are just super excited and already planning for spring 2021," said Dr. Brown.