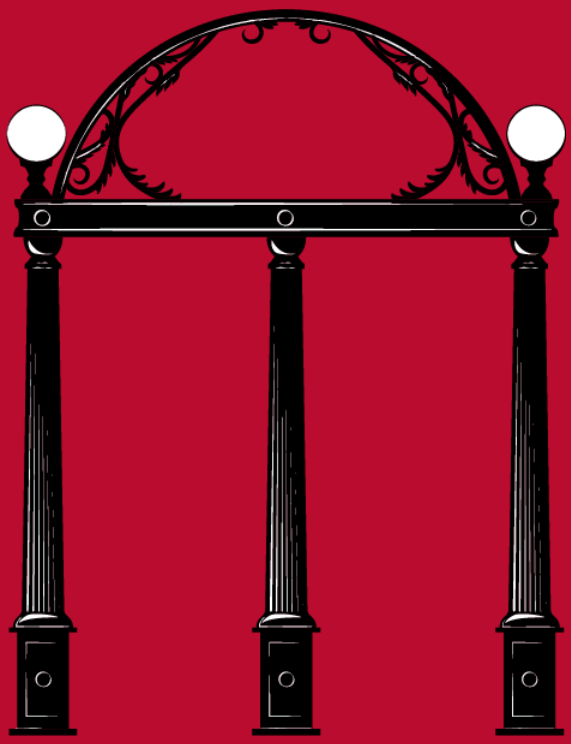
EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

Checkpoint 1.0

Franklin GPT



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CLIENT

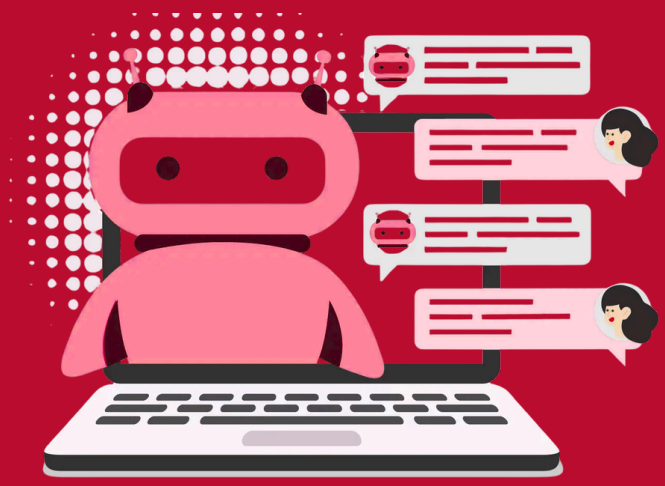
GEORGIA
Franklin College of Arts & Sciences

Franklin College Academic Advising, an internal department responsible for supporting undergraduate students academic planning and institutional navigation. Academic advisors work directly with students in scheduled and walk-in meetings to provide guidance on degree requirements, course selection, registration processes, and academic policies.

The advising office is part of the Office of Student Academic Services, led by **Dr. Angela Bowlus, Ed.D.,** who serves as the **Senior Director** of the office. Dr. Bowlus oversees academic advising, transfer support, and graduation-related services for Franklin College students, helping ensure a successful student journey from enrollment to degree completion.



PROJECT



This project will design and prototype an AI-powered support tool for Franklin College Academic Advisors. The tool will be trained on curated institutional materials such as academic policies, procedures, and program information to provide quick and accurate answers during live advising sessions.

The system will be built as a custom AI assistant with a clearly defined and limited scope focused on advising-related questions. It will rely on trusted Franklin College sources rather than general internet information, helping reduce the risk of inaccurate responses.

The functional proof of concept will demonstrate how advisors can use the tool in real time through a simple and intuitive interface. The project will also include documentation describing how the system works and outlining its limitations, ensuring the tool is positioned as a decision support resource rather than a replacement for advisor expertise.

GOALS

Reduce Advisor Search Time

- Provides advisors with a centralized AI-powered tool that integrates policies, program information, procedures, and campus resources in one place
- Replace inefficient workflows, such as searching multiple documents, PDFs, websites, or asking colleagues via Slack with instant, context aware responses
- Free up advisors' time so they can handle more students or focus on complex personalized guidance rather than administrative tasks

Enhance Quality of Advisor-Student Interactions

- Support advisors in delivering accurate, relevant information during live student meetings
- Allow advisors to spend more time on meaningful conversations such as career guidance, academic planning, or student specific problem solving
- Promote consistency across advisors, ensuring that all students receive high quality guidance on the same up-to-date information

Ensure Accuracy and Trust in AI Responses

- Use a curated knowledge base of Franklin College documents including policies, academic program information, and procedural guides
- Incorporate transparency by showing sources for all AI responses & stating limitations where uncertainty exists
- Encourage a human in-the-loop approach where advisors verify critical information, maintaining accountability and reliability

TARGET USERS

Primary Users

The primary users of this tool are Franklin College Academic Advisors who meet with students daily to provide guidance on academic policies, course planning, and institutional procedures. These advisors often need fast, reliable answers during live advising sessions, where delays can interrupt the flow of conversation and reduce the quality of student support.

Advisors will use this tool as a real-time reference assistant to quickly retrieve accurate information about:

- Degree Requirements and Program Structures
- Academic Policies (ex. deadlines, withdrawal, appeals, etc.)
- Registration procedures and deadlines
- Campus resources and referral pathways

This tool is designed to fit naturally into existing advising workflows, acting as a support system rather than a replacement for advisor expertise. It assumes users have institutional knowledge but need rapid access to specific details without switching between multiple websites or documents.

Secondary Users

Secondary users include advising coordinators, supervisors, and academic support staff who are responsible for maintaining consistent advising practices. For these users, the tool can:

- Promote alignment across advisors by providing standardized policy answers
- Reduce reliance on Slack channels for policy clarification
- Support onboarding and training of new advisors by offering a centralized knowledge base

These users may also interact with the system by helping curate or update the underlying content sources to ensure accuracy over time.

Non-Users

The tool is not intended for direct student use. It's interface, language, and content are designed for trained staff members who understand institutional context and can interpret policies appropriately.

INSPIRATION

University of Michigan "Maizey" & Campus AI Agents



- Ilustrates how AI agents can support academic services by answering questions about degree requirements, registration, and campus resources
- Highlights the effectiveness of real time, on demand assistance for users outside of traditional office hours
- Influenced the design goal of using AI to augment human advisors by handling common informational needs quickly.

Wonderchat - Higher Education Chatbots



- Demonstrates how AI trained on insitution - specific policies and documentation can provide accurate, domain-relevant responses
- Shows the values of verifiable answers and human escalation pathways for maintaining trust in administrative and academic support tools
- Informs this project's focus on reducing staff worked by handling repetitive information questions efficiently

SmartCourse: AI-Powered Course Advising System



- Demonstrates the potential of AI systems that incorporate contextual academic data such as transcripts and degree plans
- Shows how AI can provide personalized recommendations
- Informs future directions for advisor tools that could integrate student-specific context to enhance relevance and decision support

HOW TO IMPROVE

Academic advisors play a critical role in guiding students through course selection, degree planning, and navigating institutional policies. However, a significant portion of their time is spent searching for accurate information across multiple websites, PDFs, or by consulting colleagues, which can interrupt the flow of meetings and reduce overall efficiency. Inconsistent or delayed responses may also lead to student frustration or confusion.

By implementation of a real-time AI support tool, advisors can access accurate, up-to-date information instantly, allowing them to focus on high-value, personalized guidance rather than repetitive administrative tasks. The AI acts as a decision support system, providing verified information, citing sources, and acknowledging limitations, while leaving final judgment to the human advisor.

This approach is designed to streamline workflows, reduce cognitive load, and increase the quality of advisor-student interactions, ultimately improving student outcomes and advisor satisfaction. The four-step process: curating a knowledge base, building a custom AI model, designing a workflow-friendly interface, and testing/refining the system. This ensures that the tool is reliable and user-friendly, fully integrated into existing advising practices.



STEPS TO ACHIEVEMENT

1. **Develop Curated Knowledge Base**
   - Collect and organize official Franklin College resources, including policies, academic programs, procedures, and campus support materials
   - Ensure the content is structured for AI retrieval (PDFs, structured text, or databases)
   - Regularly update the knowledge base ot maintain accuracy
2. **Implement a Custom GPT with Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG)**
   - Train a GPT model to use the curated knowledge base for accurate, context-aware responses
   - Integrate retrieval mechanisms so the AI only generates answers grounded in trusted internal documents
   - Include prompt guidelines to ensure clarity, source citation, and acknowledgement of uncertainty
3. **Design Workflow - Friendly User Interface**
   - Build an intuitive dashboard or Slack/Teams integration where advisors can query information without leaving meetings
   - Display answers clearly with sources and quick links to original documents for verification
   - Allow advisors to provide feedback to improve AI accuracy over time
4. **Test, Evaluate, and Iterate**
   - Conduct pilot testing with advisors using real-world advising scenarios
   - Measure metrics such as response accuracy, time saved, and advisor satisfaction
   - Refine prompts, interfacte, and knowledge sources based on feedback to

continuously improve performance

TOOLS & SOFTWARE

RAG Approach with Custom GPT

- AI responses are generated using retrieved policy and advising documents rather than relying on the model's general knowledge
- Early prototypes implement this approach by uploading curated documents directly into a Custom GPT to validate accuracy, scope, and usefulness
- Tools such as LlamaIndex and LangChain were reviewed as potential options for more advanced document ingestion and retrieval workflows in later project iterations, but are not part of the current build due to time, scope, and infrastructure constraints

Open AI GPT-4/Custom GPTs

- Serves as the core langauge model for this project. It is used to generate advisor facing responses grounded in trusted advising documents and enables fast prototyping without additional infrastructure
- Alternative models such as Anthropic Claude and LLaMA were reviewed during exploratory research but were not selected for initial development due to scope and integration considerations

Figma

- Used to design advisor facing dashboards, user flows, and interactive prototypes.
- Supports collaboration, rapid iteration, and usability testing

throughout the project

SOURCES

- The Year of the AI Agent in Higher Education
- SmartCourse: A Contextual AI-Powered Course Advising System for...
- Welcome to LlamaIndex 🦙 !
- LangChain
- Chatbot for Higher Education | Accurate Answers | Wonderchat
- Introducing GPTs
- Figma: The Collaborative Interface Design Tool