Competitive Analysis Overview

A competitive analysis is a strategy where we identify the major competitors and understand their approach to the same type of product. By doing so, we can understand the pros and cons of certain features and implementations to help make informed decisions when improving the Slate platform.

Overview: In our analysis, we evaluated 1 homegrown, 2 direct competitors, and 3 other schools that are using Slate. Within its evaluation, we took a look at their existing features, user interface, and structure.

- 1 homegrown
  - GATS
- 2 direct competitors
  - Target X
  - Element 451
- 3 other schools using Slate
  - UC Merced
  - Baylor University
  - Johns Hopkins University

Homegrown (1)

GATS

The historical system was developed by UCI's school of engineering to transition from paper to digital. It was used by the faculty in all departments where the usability of the system differed from school to school. However, the system did not have centralized support.

- When reviewing the Applicant's page on GATS, the information is presented in an excel format, which allows users to quickly sort through different categories. The categories included relevant topics that are frequently used by the faculty, such as test scores, degree, and GPA (as shown below).

- GATS breaks down the review form based on specific roles, such as Reviewer, Updater, Committee, and Admin form as shown below. Applicants' information is presented all at once in a vertical scrolling format. Unlike Slate, GATs presents the information in a way where users do not need to go through several pages to look through the information.

- UCI receives applicants from all over the world that do not follow the same 4.0 GPA scoring system that the U.S uses. GATS provides information on the international version of the country's GPA scoring system along with the U.S version to allow faculty to compare and choose their preference in determining the applicant's qualification.

GRADUATE APPLICATION TRACKING SYSTEM
UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA · IRVINE

Applicants | Statistics | Help | Logout

Reviewer form | Updater form | Committee form | Admin form | Print view | OGS application

Name: Nikkhah, Ali   **Sex:** M   **Student ID:** 37564977   **Grad Div App:** 310729   **App recd:** 12/29/2017   **App comp:** 01/22/2018
Email: alinikkhah8294@gmail.com
Tracker: applicant last login: 05/13/2018 4:30am (5 previous logins)
Status: Final: **Admitted**, applicant notified 04/13/2018, ACR sent: 04/13/2018 , Grad Div Status: Provisional Admit (scores/trans) 07/30/2018,
SIR: Y

Applied to: ⊚   PhD   **Term:** F 2018   **Accelerated:** N   **Fee Waiver:** N   **Prev app:**
Degree req: ⊚   PhD   **Study:**   **Aid requested:** Y   **GEM eligible:**
Major: 20N Networked Systems
Area of interest: Networked Systems Ph.D./Networks/ Management of Technology
Specialization: Network performance / Traffic engineering (20N)

Mailing Address: No. 23, North Vatanpour street   **Permanent Address:**   No. 23, North Vatanpour street
(use until 01/01/2030)   Andarzgo street, Farmanieh street   (use until 01/01/2030)   Andarzgo street, Farmanieh street
City/State: Tehran   City/State: Tehran
Country/ZIP: Iran 1937716539   Country/ZIP: Iran 1937716539
Phone: +989127798462   Phone: +989127798462

Citizenship/Residency (Student self-reported - not official)
Birthdate: 02/08/1994   Birthplace: Kashan/Isfahan/Iran
Country of citizenship: Visa type: F1
Ethnicity: Decline to State
California resident: N
Foreign student: Y (I-20 reqd)   **Country:**

GRE date Verbal Ver%   Quant Qnt%   Writing Analyt Ana% Source
11/2017   141   *15%*   166   *91%*   3.0   OGS/Official
Note: GRE verbal/quant scale is 130-170 starting 8/2011; prior scores are 200-800.
ETS provides estimated 130-170 scores for older tests.

English Language Testing required: Y
ELT TA Eligible: N

TOEFL	Type	Reading	Listening	Essay or Speaking	Structure/ Writing	Total	Source
08/2016	iBT	21	25	22.00	24	**92**	OGS

University name	Dates enrolled	App GPA	Dept GPA
(OTHER SCHOOL - IRAN) / Iran	09/08 - 06/12	19.74/20.00	
High school diploma , Mathematics & Physics , 06/12	Self/scaled:	3.97/4.00	
(OTHER SCHOOL - IRAN) / Iran	09/12 - 06/16	17.28/20.00	3.64/4.00
B.S. , Electrical Engineering (Communication Branch) , 06/16	Self/scaled:	3.64/4.00	
(OTHER SCHOOL - IRAN) / Iran	09/16 - 06/18	17.66/20.00	3.69/4.00
M.S. , ElectricalEngineering Communication Systems Branch	Self/scaled:	3.69/4.00	

Masters degree completed prior to UCI: Y

UCI Correspondence
Ender Ayanoglu
Magda El Zarki
Scott Jordan
Athina Markopoulou

Recommendation letters received
Mahtab Mirmohseni
Mohammadreza Pakravan

- GATs allows users to download and view attachments, such as a letter of recommendation, transcript, and admission off letters, to view the documents in the pdf format as shown above. Under the "Updater Comments" section, users can view the comments provided by their colleagues. It also includes a timestamp to show when the application was being reviewed as shown below.

researching under the supervision of Professor Jordan. The research topics mentioned on his web page, specifically "Interconnection arrangements between Internet service providers, transit providers, content providers, and content distribution networks" was highly appealing to me. Another professor who I will be glad to research under her supervision is Professor Markopoulou. I'm genuinely interested in her research areas, especially "Online Social Networks", and "Peer-to-Peer Networks." I would also be delighted to work with Professor Ayanoglu's research group because of his work on "optical networks," "packet networks," "wireless packet networks." Furthermore, Professor Zarki's research in "Video over IP (VIP)," "Real Time Services over Wireless Networks," and "Online Games" appealed to me. I hope I will find the chance to do a Ph.D. degree in your prestigious research group.

I am sure that I can be among the best alumni of your university. I am hard-working and ingenious so that I can be a successful student at your university. I hope you give me this chance and I'm sure you will never regret choosing me.

Active military duty/veteran: N
Interest in on-campus housing: Y

Download/view attachments

Mahtab Mirmohseni	Letter of recommendation	(electronic)	12/15/2017
Mohammadreza Pakravan	Letter of recommendation	(electronic)	12/15/2017
HAMID BEHROOZI	Letter of recommendation	(electronic)	12/15/2017
Mohammad Fakharzadeh	Letter of recommendation	(electronic)	12/02/2017
Sharif Uni of Tech BS.pdf	Transcript	(94.8 Kb)	01/19/2018
Sharif Uni of Tech MS.pdf	Transcript	(55.2 Kb)	01/19/2018
Nikkhah Ai_ admit_offer	Admission offer letter	(226 Kb)	04/12/2018

Updater Comments
1/19/18: Paper file created on 12/06. ~EM. Now in GATS as of 1/19. Both BS and MS marked official. Still waiting on High school diploma. ~KH
1/19/18 Scanned and matched BS and MS transcript. GPA needs to be converted-EM
1/30/18 - GPA converted - DT
4/19/18 Received complete I-20 forms. Marked as received and processed them -AL

Reviewer Recommendation/Comments
Strong admit ▼ | Flagged: ☑ If admitted, I would: Supervise: ☑ Support: ☑

By Scott Jordan (sjordan@uci.edu) on Thu, 12 Apr 2018, 9:22 AM [Department: Admit PhD]

By Scott Jordan (sjordan@uci.edu) on Thu, 12 Apr 2018, 9:21 AM [Committee: Admit with aid]

By Scott Jordan (sjordan@uci.edu) on Thu, 12 Apr 2018, 9:20 AM [Strong admit]
Now recommending admission with aid.

By Scott Jordan (sjordan@uci.edu) on Fri, 2 Feb 2018, 11:12 AM
Strong (but not top) GPAs in B.S. and M.S. programs at a top 2 university in Iran. Hold until later in the review process.

Reviewer avg rec: Strong admit (1 review; 1 strong admit)

Admission Decision/Status: Final: Admitted

Aid Requested:	Y	**Proof of funds received:**	N
Committee Rec:	Admit with aid	**Initial Advisor:**	
Dept. Decision:	Admit PhD	**Aid Offer:**	Jordan, Scott
			Yes

	Fees	NRT	Stipend	Summer	Other	Total
First year aid:	17,333	15,102	20,000			52,435

School Approved: Approved 04/12/2018 **School Comment:** 4/12/18 JB
SIR Email date: 04/13/2018 **Housing Info sent:** 04/17/2018

Update | Cancel | Reset Form

- Filters are grouped under a specific category for users to select from. Each category uses languages that are easy to understand and recognize by users.

Direct Competitors (2)

Target X: https://www.targetx.com/

One of the packages that Target X offers is called the Target X Recruitment Suite. Although most of the features focus on recruitment and communicating aspects with applicants, they also offer a feature that allows users to review the applications, which has a similar style as Slate but with a modern user interface appearance.

- Target X Recruitment Suite:

    - Personalization
        - Make touchpoints meaningful for students. Make student's experience memorable through online and in-person
    - Mobile-optimized
        - Mobile-first online app allows students to start or complete their application from any device
    - Application Review tool
        - All application data is aggregated into a clean, comprehensive view. View test scores, letters of rec, transcripts, and any other requirements. The tool can be used offline and on the go
    - Reports and Dashboard
        - Easily configure reports and dashboards that help identify patterns, changes, and knowledge in real-time.
    - UChat
        - Connect with more students during the discovery phase of their college search while improving the overall student experience with UChat — a live chat widget built specifically for higher ed.
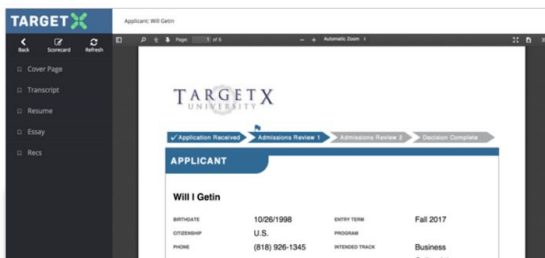
Work remotely, independently, and *paperlessly* during application review season.

With the TargetX Application Review tool, there's no need to sort through piles of paper applications or carry heavy folders around with you during reading season — all application data is aggregated into a clean, comprehensive view that's native to the CRM. Reviewers can view an applicant's test scores, letters of recommendation, transcripts, and any other requirements all in one web-based interface while leaving comments and assigning scores to different sections according to your institution's predefined rubric. Best of all, staff can access the tool offline so reading can be done remotely or even on the go.

Evaluate and admit best-fit students with a streamlined review process.

The TargetX Application Review tool allows multiple readers across your team to annotate application elements, create a data-driven review process based on your institution's predefined scoring rubric, and collaborate with ease to minimize mundane administrative work and enroll the strongest possible incoming class. During the implementation process, TargetX works with different departments on campus to identify and/or refine existing rating scales and sub-scores. Scoring and rating scales can be based on nearly any factor including program, application type, or staff reviewer (individually and/or by department). Applications will be assigned to readers using your school's unique review process or auto-admitted based on predetermined criteria.
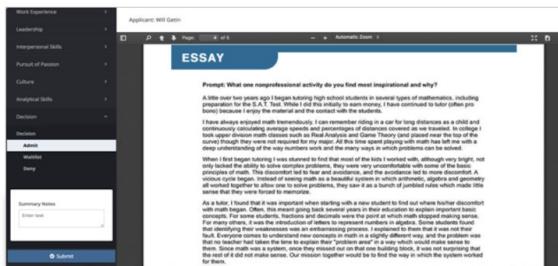
- Pros:
  - User interface uses contrasting colors to easily see where users are when navigating through the tabs.
  - Present files in pdf format, which eliminates pixel quality documents and easier way to zoom in and out of the file with the pdf interface.
  - Has a status bar on the top to show which stage the applicant is currently at.
  - Multiple suites that are part of the same system (Recruitment, Retention, App, Insights)
  - UChat provides prospective students with more engagement

- Cons:
  - Similar structure as Slate, where you have to click on tabs to see every category of the application components.
  - It would still be difficult to review large amounts of applications because they would still have to individually look at several pages of information for each applicant.

- Clients
  - Georgetown University
  - Plymouth State University
  - George Mason University
  - Illinois Institute of Technology

Element 451: https://element451.com/

Element451 empowers admissions and enrollment teams to work more efficiently with their cloud-based system. The most important features are their automation and analytics features along with their modern and clean user interface design.

Features:

- Auto-evaluate feature to score applicants

- Application Generation and Decisioning
  - Focused on creating a better user experience for prospective students by optimizing for mobile usability.
- Mobile-optimized
  - Mobile-first online app allows students to start or complete their application from any device
- Reports and Dashboard
  - Includes analytics, segment reports, conversion analysis, and more data reporting.
- A/B Testing
  - Includes the ability to test versions of subject lines, message content, and etc.
- Tons of features
  - Drag and drop CMS, multichannel online decision packages, export PDF of the application portfolio, customizable stage-based application review, branded to school, real-time analytics, audience segmentation
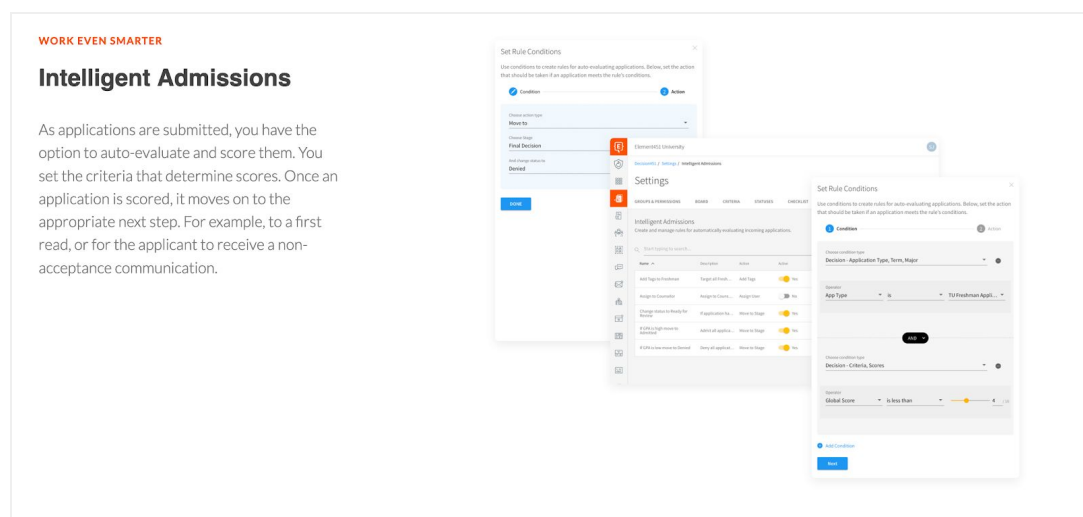
- Interfaces:

Cohort Management

Cohort management makes it simple to organize applications based on things like term, school, major, and program. Then, groups of readers and other reviewers can quickly find the applications they're responsible for.
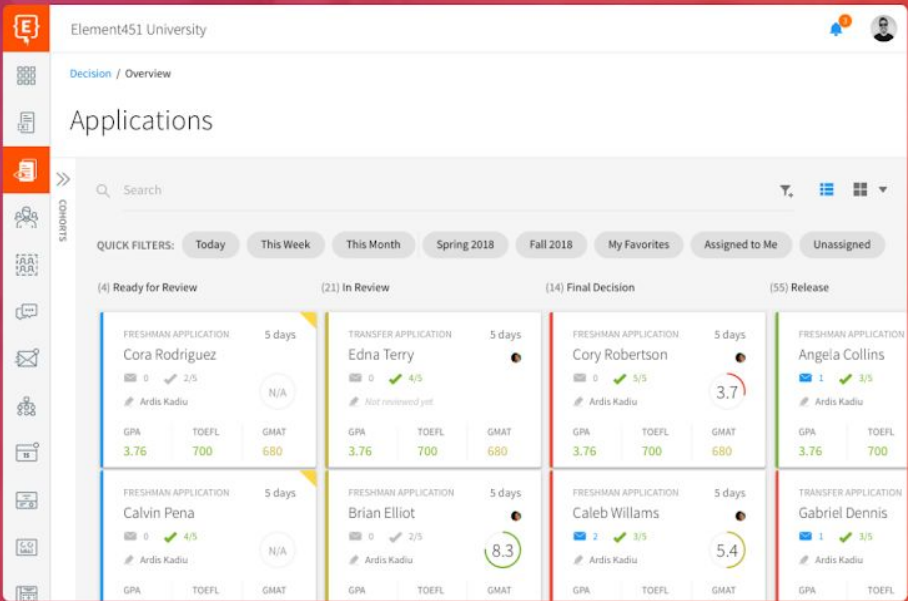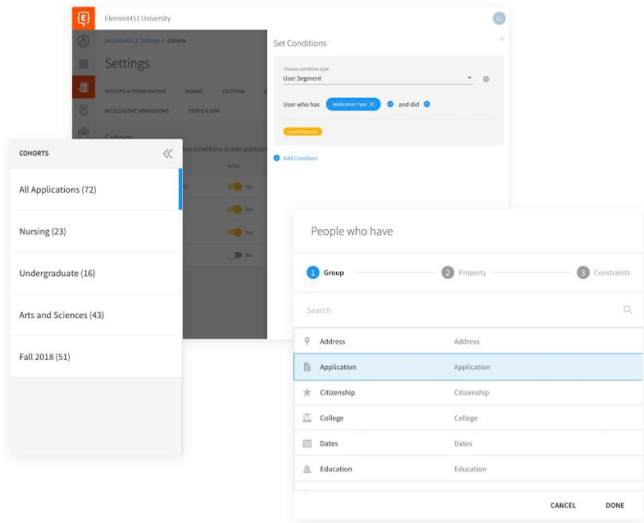
- Pros:
  - Using current design trends and clean user interface
    - It uses a card-like structure like Trello to see applicant's information under each category of the application process
    - Has the ability to color code, which makes it easier to absorb and remember the information.
    - Utilizes negative space to present information in a less constrained environment and with visual hierarchy.
  - Auto-evaluate features to score large amounts of applications to save time.
- Cons:
  - With so many high end features that utilize specific aspects of technology, the price may be more expensive.
  - The Application page with Trello features would be difficult to implement if there are a large number of applicants for each category.

- Clients
  - New York University
  - Cornell Tech
  - Icahn School of Medicine, Mount Sinai
  - Drew University

Other Schools using Slate (3)
- UC Merced
  - https://graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/sites/graduatedivision.ucmerced.edu/files/documents/PDFs/updated-_slate_faculty_guide.pdf
- Baylor University
  - https://www.baylor.edu/graduate/index.php?id=959738
- Johns Hopkins University
  - https://uis.jhu.edu/slate-training-materials/faculty-resources-for-slate/

Due to the design and constrained environment of Slate, most schools were using the platform the same way. Baylor University and Johns Hopkins University have a similar organizational structure when creating the bin flows as UCI. On the other hand, there were several interesting implementations that UC Merced made that stood out amongst the rest of the schools.

UC Merced**:**

- UC Merced sets up their bin structure with only 2 columns, Evaluation and Admission, while other schools had 5 to 6 columns. With 2 columns, it was easy to quickly understand the bin flow.
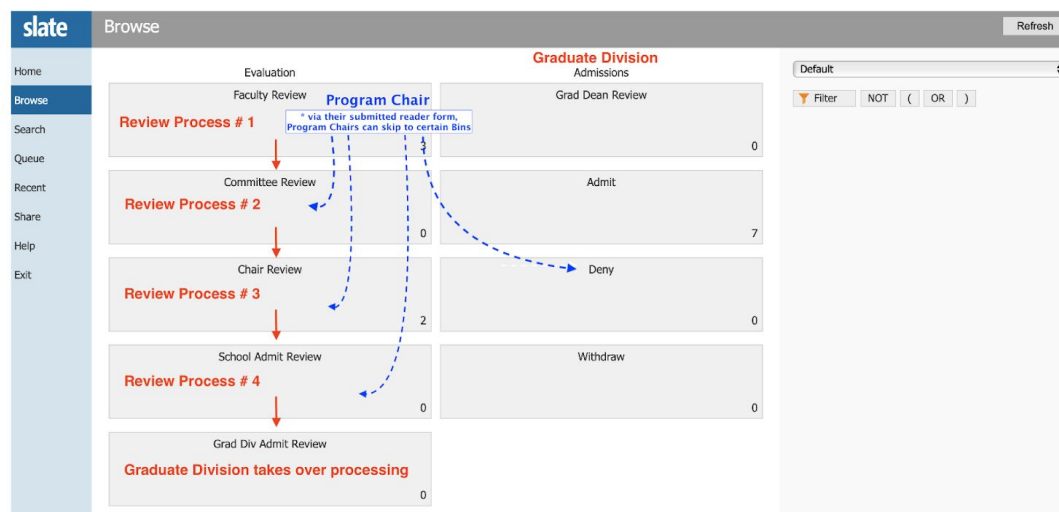
- On the search page column header, the name of the categories was spelled out instead of using acronyms. This minimizes the user's memory load without the need to remember what each of the categories means.
- The column header sections are divided into 6 sections, which does not overload users with too much information.

- Within the faculty group, the roles are divided into 4 different roles. Some roles share the same Slate permission but are broken down into different levels. The higher the role, the more access to move applications into different bins.

Roles:

Faculty members can only view the applications submitted to the graduate groups that they are members of. Faculty users can view their applications at all stages of review and admission. **However, the information and functions available to users depend on their assigned roles.** The roles for faculty are:

- **Regular Faculty** reviewers can add comments and input at the Faculty Review stage only. They cannot move applications through the review stages.
- **Admissions Committee** reviewers can add comments and input for applications in Faculty and Committee Review stages. **They cannot move applications through the review stages.**
- **Admissions Committee Chair** reviewers can add comments as above, and they can move applications into Committee Review and Chair Review.
- **Graduate Group Chair** reviewers can do all of above, and also add comments and input at Chair Review, as well as move applications into School Review for administrative review

- In the applicant packet, specifically the applicant page, UC Merced utilizes the space to provide well-rounded information about an applicant, including but not limited to background, and research interests. It provides an overview summary of the applicant from a high level.

Conclusion

After doing the competitive analysis, there were:

- 4 findings
- 3 key takeaways from how other schools using Slate
- 14 recommendations spread across different verticals (home, list interface, filter, bins, applicant information interface, other)

Key Findings (4)

- User interface update would enhance the presentation of information

- Organizing information in a detailed, clear, and more structured way (like GATS) allows finding information easier and faster.

- GATS was working well due to the simplicity of it. SLATE has more features but failed to capitalize on them by not catering to the users and their needs.

- Other competitors have a clearer organizational structure for displaying list information compared to SLATE.

Key Takeaways From How Schools are using Slate (3):

- UC Merced implements at a high level, where only the important categories are shown on the column header sections and limiting the usage of bin columns.
- UC Merced breaks down the faculty role into 4 sub-roles.
- Baylor University and Johns Hopkins have similar processes and implementations as UCI.

Recommendations (14)

Home:
- Updating the menu from icons to words

List Interface:
- Maximize presenting the full word of the category on the header as seen by other schools that are using Slate.
  - Removes the requirement of remembering what each acronym means. Quick and easy to understand and less confusion.

- Icons used throughout Slate is not clear and does not represent the category or purpose well. Replace with a stronger visual element.
- Update visuals by incorporating elements from Element 451
  - Use colors to depict low, med, high scores, and GPA
- Update interface style to be more up to date with current trends. Easy on the eyes and helps support content through the use of visual hierarchy.

Filter Interface:
- Organize/group filter options based on relevant categories as seen on GATS for easy findings.
  - GATS organized the filters in groups of different categories which is easy on the eyes to scan for information.
  - Current filter structure is difficult to understand with the way it is currently grouped right now because it is too broad.
- Remove the SLATE template library if it's not necessary
  - If it is, reorganize into dropdown menus or searchable functions to reduce the amount of real-estate taken
- Provide status of how many filters have been selected from each category (inspired by element 451's application interface)

BIN Interface:
- Element 451's application interface displays quick info about individual applicants in the bins for a quick look. Apply similar ideas to Slate bins to provide quick info as a preview.
  - Example: Along with displaying how many applications are in each bin, also display how many of them are domestic and international applicants.
  - UI redesign, similar to TargetX and Element451's interface which is a more modern and cleaner take on displaying applicant information
- Trello-like card system but faculties can't move applicants themselves without a two-step process with staff (unsure if this change is possible, probably not due to permissions)

Applicant Information Interface:
- Change from horizontal page scroll to vertical page scroll
- Fix the sticky note/post-it annotation interaction feature at the bottom of the screen
  - Multiple inconsistent interactions