



HOW SJSU IS USING AI ADVISING TO STRENGTHEN STUDY ABROAD DISCOVERY



Summary

NAME:

San José State University
(SJSU)

LOCATION:

San Jose, CA

OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

- 36,000+ total students
- 27,000+ undergraduate students
- 8,100+ graduate students
- 2,500+ international students
- 100 countries across the student body

At San José State University (SJSU), innovation is a core institutional priority. Located in Silicon Valley, the university actively encourages faculty, staff, and students to explore AI's potential across campus.

For Dr. Vidalino Raatior, Coordinator of Study Abroad & Away Programs, piloting Terra Dotta's AI Program Assistant was both practical and strategic. With nearly 25 years in international education, Raatior oversees a wide portfolio, ranging from bilateral exchanges and third-party programs to domestic exchanges and California State University system-wide opportunities, helping students identify programs tailored to their academic and personal goals.

"As the TerraDotta superuser for the Study Abroad & Away team, I wanted us to support the institutional goals of normalizing AI technology to improve student support services in our area of global education. In the spirit of Silicon Valley, I wanted us to be part of the early adoption of the AI Program Assistant to help shape the future of this super important technology." Raatior comments on the opportunity to see AI Program Assistant in action and test its capabilities.

6X

growth in student engagement with AI advising between May and August

46%

of AI conversations demonstrate deep, sustained student interactions

100%

alignment between AI search data and program information, supporting a centralized content strategy



The true value of the pilot program emerged a few weeks after launch when Terra Dotta's enablement team delivered comprehensive usage analytics.

Opportunities

250+

academic programs

457

student organizations

9

colleges

60

bilateral exchange partners

200+

third-party provider locations

Access

to the 23-campus CSUIP network

Access

to the 150-member National Student Exchange consortium

From program discovery to more personalized guidance

Rolling out a new advising tool means making sure students actually want to use it and trust what it offers. SJSU introduced the AI Program Assistant in April 2026, seamlessly blending it into the Spartans Abroad Portal, their customized Terra Dotta hub.

To spread the word, the team tapped into their campus-wide digital newsletter, an established channel already tuned to student habits. The response was immediate. Right after the newsletter hit inboxes, the office noticed clear surges in program applications, sometimes in under an hour. By embedding the AI Program Assistant directly where students explore and promoting it during key decision-making hours, SJSU made starting a conversation effortless. Students could discover an exciting program, jump straight into the portal, and instantly ask the AI advisement tool how to get there.

Data that unlocks student intent

The true value of the pilot program emerged a few weeks after launch when Terra Dotta's enablement team delivered comprehensive usage analytics.

Between May 1 and September 2026, the team analyzed interactions with the AI Program assistant, identifying 85 unique student conversations encompassing 402 messages. The data revealed a steady, accelerating adoption curve, with engagement growing sixfold from May to August. More importantly, the sessions were not superficial. The average conversation involved multiple turns, and 46% of sessions evolved into multi-turn, in-depth inquiries.

Early reports also shattered assumptions about what students prioritize during their initial exploration phase. The top inquiry was not about travel logistics or visa requirements. Fifty of the 85 conversations opened by asking about major or field-of-study alignment.

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Destinations were the second most popular topic, with Europe and Asia drawing nearly equal interest. Furthermore, students across 25 academic majors interacted with the solution, including highly specialized fields such as aviation, packaging, art history, and library science. It even began fielding inquiries from recent graduates seeking alumni opportunities and students planning out as far as the spring 2030 term.

The workflow revelation: centralizing content for AI success

The pilot program provided SJSU with a crucial operational insight that serves as a powerful best practice for any higher education institution preparing to adopt AI.

Terra Dotta's AI Program Assistant is intentionally designed as a closed ecosystem. It draws answers only from information hosted directly on an institution's Terra Dotta site. It does not scrape the broader web, nor does it pull from an institution's external campus websites, independent blogs, or internal Google Drives. This secure architecture prevents hallucinations and ensures that the AI delivers only institution-approved guidance.

Historically, like many universities, SJSU maintained a bifurcated information strategy. Program-specific brochures, exchange details, and application workflows lived inside the Terra Dotta portal, while overarching policies, financial aid procedures, and general student resources lived on the main university website or in shared drives.

The AI usage reports made it clear that this decentralized approach would no longer serve the students. Because students were asking the AI Program Assistant complex questions about academic fit across majors such as nutrition science, business, and psychology, the tool needed immediate access to comprehensive curriculum data.



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"It is only as good as what we feed into our Terra Dotta site for students," Raatior notes. This realization transformed the pilot into a strategic catalyst for operational excellence. Armed with data proving exactly what students were searching for, the SJSU team secured a clear, evidence-based mandate to audit and update their program listings.

"As long as the AI Program Assistant is live and giving out information, we need to make sure that information is as accurate as possible," Raatior explains. "Bandwidth is also a critical challenge for us, but it can't be a barrier to getting students the information they need." Instead of viewing the content migration as a burden, the team embraced it as a necessary evolution. Centralizing their resources not only powers a smarter AI Program Assistant but also creates a cleaner, more intuitive digital experience for students navigating the portal independently.

A partnership for the future of global education

SJSU's experience highlights a clear shift in how study abroad offices can serve students today, showing how technology can become a natural, interactive part of the advising process.

The relationship between SJSU and Terra Dotta goes well beyond standard software support. The university works closely with Terra Dotta's enablement and product teams to analyze usage data and co-author an AI training guide. This shared resource outlines practical strategies for organizing brochure content, tagging academic majors, and centralizing program information, creating a helpful blueprint for other institutions introducing AI tools of their own.

By taking a thoughtful, proactive approach to AI, San José State is continuing its long tradition of innovation. The team is streamlining internal processes, sharpening its information strategy, and giving students immediate access to accurate answers.