PROVIDING SERVICE INNOVATIONS TO STUDENTS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE ONLINE CLASSROOM: FOCUSING ON STUDENT SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

While institutions recognize the need to provide online student support services, the most effective approaches for developing and delivering these services are not always clear. The need to support students inside and outside the online classroom calls for collaborative efforts from many constituencies. The articles in this volume illustrate good practices in providing student-centered service innovations designed to improve academic success and retention.

KEY WORDS

student support, online services, retention

I. INTRODUCTION

Colleges and universities provide an array of services to support campus-based students. However, institutions may struggle to develop and implement the most efficient and effective ways to design and deliver services for online students. No matter where an institution stands on the level of services provided to online students, there is no longer a question about the importance of these efforts. There seems to be general agreement that online students need the same support services provided to students taking traditionally delivered instruction. However, online students may need some additional services to help them become acclimated to learning online. The topic of student service innovations is especially important since many students are now involved with multiple modes of learning in the same semester.

Many students—campus-based or online--need, and want, support services to be student-centered and available to them 24/7/365. When student support services are effectively developed for remotely located students, these same services can be used by all students. Local students may choose to participate in fully online services, or take advantage of a blend of online and in person services.

In addition to what is needed by all new college students, students new to online learning need to know what to expect from the online learning experience. They need to know in advance whether they have, or can obtain, the required hardware, software, and technical skills. Students also need to be introduced to strategies about how to be successful when teaching and learning is time and place shifted.

Campus-based students are free to drop into various academic and student support offices whenever these offices are open. For fully online students, proactive efforts must be made to connect them with these services. Faculty members are frequently the primary contact online students have with the institution. Faculty members are typically the first to know when students are in trouble, and they often are called on to connect these students with the necessary support services.

Some online faculty members see student referral to services role as a part of their responsibilities.

Others are reluctant to add student support responsibilities when they are already being asked to do more than ever before. One challenge is to identify what student services the institution already is providing for online students, and then to look for ways that faculty can more easily identify students who are at risk, and integrate these processes into the online classroom.

This issue of JALN focuses on examples of student-centered service innovations that benefit all learners.

II. SCOPE OF ONLINE SERVICES

There are a variety of ways to consider the scope of online student services. A spider web of services was developed by WICHE/WCET as part of a U.S. Department of Education, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education Learning Anytime Any Place (FIPSE LAAP) grant [1]. The spider web organizes 31 online student services into five "Suites": Academic Services, Communications, Administrative Core, Student Communities, and Personal Services. Of prime importance is that the needs of students are at the core of the framework. The services within each suite are:

Academic services
- Academic Advising
- Technical Support
- Academic Counseling
- Bookstore
- Retention Services
- Tutoring
- Library
- Developmental Education Services
- Disability Services
- Assessment & Testing

Communications
- Student-to-Student Communications
- Staff-to-Faculty Communications
- Faculty-to-Student Communications
- Faculty-to-Staff Communications
- Institution-to-Student Communications

Administrative Core
- Financial Aid
- Schedule of Classes
- Course/Program Catalog
- Admissions
- Student Accounts
- Student Records
- Registration

Student communities
- Student Activities
- Student Population Segments

Personal services
- Financial Planning
- Placement Services
- Ethical & Legal Services
- Orientation
- Personal Counseling
- Career Services
- Wellness Services

Another framework is a generational model that represents the evolution of web-based student services. The Center for Transforming Student Services (CENTSS) has developed an audit tool that provides a process to help institutions evaluate the quality of their online student services. The CENTSS audit tool describes web-based online student services as follows:

- Generation 1 is used to describe services that are not represented on a college's website.
- Generation 2 are services that are information only, similar to print brochures, and are based on the organizational structure of an institution.
- Generation 3 is information that is targeted to specific audiences such as prospective students, continuing students, community members, and alums to name a few.
- Generation 4 is information that is process oriented. These services are customizable and personalized to meet the needs of individual students. Typically these services are made available behind a password protected portal.
- Generation 5 is information, as defined by CENTSS that can be thought of as a virtual mentor. These services may allow students to make decisions based on "what-if" scenarios [2].

One way to conceptualize service innovations for students is to look at those that would be considered Generations 4 and 5. These services enable students to interact with information, select only the information that is relevant for them, complete college transactions, and save the work they have done in

online repositories, similar to ePortfolios.

These frameworks provide the reader with an overview of the possible services available to students now and in the future. Since many students are enrolling in multiple instructional delivery modes in the same semester, it is important that online services be available to all students. The challenge for institutions of higher education is not only to provide effective services to students, but to find meaningful ways to connect students to these services.

III. MAKING CONNECTIONS

Support for online students is provided by a variety of professionals in addition to specific student services offices. Online students have most contact with their instructors, distance learning staff and administrators. How can these professionals identify barriers to success and connect students with appropriate services? One ongoing challenge for both online and onground instructors is making effective student referrals for support services. Onground instructors may describe to individual students relevant services, explain how students might benefit from participating in the services, provide the name and contact information for a support professional and in some cases, actually bring a student to meet that person. The only part of this process not available to online instructors is the ability to physically introduce students to support professionals.

Professional student support personnel are only one type of service provider. Self-service is another way students can participate in support services. Technology has supported the development of many self-service options including those used both inside and outside of the classroom. Outside the online classroom, self-support may be delivered through static online information, interactive multimedia orientations and tutorials, or sophisticated applications that allow students to complete transactions such as degree audits. Other examples of self-support services are library tutorials, writing center tutorials, and health and wellness information. Inside the online classroom, technology provides on-demand support to students through software tracking applications, eblogs, and lecture capture. Self-support services benefit students because they are available when the student needs them, and in many cases do not require assistance from a professional or peer.

Yet another way students can participate in support services is through peer mentoring programs. Online peer mentors are trained, experienced online learners who connect and develop relationships with novice or first time online learners. One advantage of peer mentoring is that students may be more honest and supportive of one another than a student may be with a faculty member. Peer mentoring programs may be established by the institution or built into the design of online courses by individual faculty members.

Online faculty members do not have to provide the support services, but they may be called upon to make the connections between students and needed services. To make these connections, it is important for faculty members to know what services are available to online students, and how students can best access those services. What follows are examples of ways support personnel from various areas of the college can collaborate to develop and deliver services that can be made available to online students.

Staff from academic departments, student affairs offices, and technology areas might collaborate to create resources that can be made available from inside the Learning Management System (LMS) to support all online students. Institutions have created a course site which can be linked on the LMS entry page to serve as a central repository of pertinent information and multimedia tutorials. Student support personnel might facilitate synchronous or asynchronous communications, and peers might support other peers through social networking or discussion board tools inside the LMS.

Another initiative that can provide support to online students is for faculty members to invite student support professionals into online courses as guest lecturers. Faculty might create a discussion forum specifically for a person from the library or the tutoring center. This strategy often is referred to as "embedding" a librarian or tutor into the online class. Additionally, students in certain courses may tend to have particular barriers to academic success. While institutions may strive to make the broad scope of services for online students available on the institution's website, faculty may want to select only those

services that are most relevant for their particular students and make those services easily accessible from inside the LMS.

IV. EXAMPLES OF SERVICE INNOVATIONS FOR STUDENTS

This issue of JALN on service innovations for students includes effective student services that fit within existing student services frameworks, as well as those that are expanding the boundaries of those frameworks. Some of these services are provided to students within the online classroom, while other services are provided outside of the classroom. It is suggested that these services be made available to all learners, since many students are involved with multiple modes of learning in the same semester.

Many of the articles in this volume are informed by the voice of the student. This approach provides some expected, and some unexpected, insights directly from those we are striving to serve. These articles are grouped into three categories of service innovations: Retention and Quality Assurance, Student Learning, and Using Technology to Improve Teaching and Learning. Brief summaries of each article appear below.

A. Retention and Quality Assurance

1. What Do Unsuccessful Online Students Want Us To Know?

Fetzner shares the results of Monroe Community College's (Rochester, NY) online student retention surveys. The survey respondents were unsuccessful (Grade of F or W) online students, a population whose perspectives are not typically included in online program evaluation. Findings include the reasons why students felt they were not successful and advice they would share with other learners interested in taking an online course.

2. Developing and Implementing Comprehensive Student Support Services for Online Students

Britto and Rush present the efforts of the Online Student Support Services department at Lone Star College-Online to improve online student retention rates through the development of comprehensive support services. The authors describe the suite of services for online students, results from an online student services survey, and the implementation of Lone Star's Online Support Services unit which includes six major initiatives, Technology Support, an Early Alert System, Advising Services, Case Management Advising, Readiness Assessment and Student Orientation.

3. Developing and Implementing a Mandatory Online Student Orientation

Jones provides compelling information about how a mandatory online student orientation for first time online students at Richland Community College helped students' confidence in being able to succeed in online learning. Additionally, online student retention rates improved after the implementation of the mandatory orientation.

4. Online Advising Pilot at the Community College of Vermont

Nolan summarizes the results of feedback gathered from students the Community College of Vermont who were a part of an online advising pilot. The results indicated that the students involved with the pilot had a slightly higher retention rate then the overall online student population, and that these students reported a strong desire for an advisor who would stay with them throughout their academic experience at the college.

5. Social and Student Engagement and Support: The Sloan-C Quality Scorecard for the Administration of Online Programs

Moore and Shelton take the Student Engagement and Support indicators from the Quality Scorecard and cluster them into categories that reflect criteria from regional accreditation commissions. The categories are: create a sense of community for students, introduce students to online learning, support students' use

of technology, and provide online support for learning, research, resources, and guidance. The article contains examples of good practices in each category.

B. Student Learning

1. Defining the Role Adjustment Profile of Learners and Instructors Online

Burkle and Cleveland-Innes examine the dynamic and evolving roles of instructors and learners in the online classroom. As instructors move from the role of sage-on-the-stage to guide-on-the-side, learner's roles and responsibilities must adjust accordingly. The authors suggest that instructors have some responsibility for helping learners adjust to these new expectations.

2. Online Mentoring for Biotechnology Graduate Students: An Industry-Academic Partnership

Khan and Gogos describe an online Graduate Biotechnology Mentoring Program at the University of Maryland University College (UMUC) that utilizes mentors from the biotechnology industry. This student support model is embedded into the degree program and includes a mentor assistant (MA) for each mentor-mentee pair. According to end-of-the-semester student questionnaires, the mentees indicated that interaction with their mentors improved their understanding of the biotechnology industry, helped them to focus on their career goals, and gave them greater initiative to pursue networking opportunities.

C. Technology to Improve Teaching and Learning

1. Accommodating Mobile Learning in College Programs

Alden, in a study of student's perceptions of teaching and learning functions using mobile devices, found that the recommended approach to strategically planning for implementation is to be selective when choosing which instructional applications to develop. The study includes a review of instructional applications that can be delivered using mobile devices and recommendations for how mobile devices can be used effectively for faculty and student support services and the development of institutional mobile device policies.

2. Implementing Electronic Portfolios through Social Media Platforms: Steps and Student Perceptions

Denton and Wicks describe the use of electronic student portfolios (eportfolios) based on easy to use, free, and customizable social media applications. The authors describe a case study conducted at Seattle Pacific University that identifies student perceptions of using social media as a repository for electronic portfolio content and suggestions to instructors about how to implement social media based eportfolios.

3. The Social & Mobile Learning Experiences of Students Using Mobile E-books

Kissinger shares case study findings of students who used mobile electronic textbook (e-book) readers in their college introductory sociology course. The students reported that they were competent in their use of e-books, and that they valued the use of e-books for their learning. Although the students reported that they would like the opportunity to have more interactive, socially-embedded learning experiences with their e-books, the instructor felt that this would result in more shallow learning, and that it would give him less control of the learning environment. These findings suggest that some students may be more willing to expand the current uses of e-books, and this perspective may be instructive in developing enhanced support services to students.

4. Educational Leadership in an Online World: Connecting Students to Technology Responsibly, Safely, and Ethically

Ribble and Miller's article describes a Digital Citizenship model that can be used as a tool for school administrators, students, and parents to support students in their interactions with technology. This nine

factor framework addresses the gap in technology knowledge, provides best practices when using social media, and includes technology strategies to help keep students safe in the digital environment. The model can be used as a tool to help school and institutional leadership expand support services to students to include a digital citizenship component.

5. U-Pace Instruction: Improving Student Success by Integrating Content Mastery and Amplified Assistance

Reddy, Fleming, Pedrick, Jirovec, Pfeiffer, Ports, Barnack-Tavlaris, Helion, and Swain discuss U-Pace, an application that utilizes the online learning environment to integrate content mastery with Amplified Assistance (instructor-initiated, individually tailored feedback to students). The authors describe U-Pace as an application that was designed to empower students by fostering a sense of control. They present findings from U-Pace research, including the important result that a significantly higher percentage of U-Pace students earned a final course grade of A or B compared to conventionally taught students.

V. SUMMARY

The articles in this JALN issue on service innovations for students present good practices that illustrate how instructors and other professionals at colleges and universities can support students inside and outside the online classroom. Many of these articles provide descriptions of initiatives in support of student success that can be replicated for all students at other colleges and universities. These institutions are working hard to implement service innovations for students based on the needs of the learners. Whether these support services are presented to students inside or outside of the online classroom, or both, it is clear that frameworks for student support services are evolving to meet the needs of all students.

VI. ABOUT THE EDITORS

Anita Crawley, an online instructor and course developer for UCLA Extension and the Illinois Online Network, previously held counseling and faculty and administrative positions in student affairs and distance learning programs. She is recognized for her pioneering work in the field of supporting online students and is the author of *Supporting Online Students: A Practical Guide to Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Services,* Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education, 2012.

Marie Fetzner is an adjunct instructor for Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, NY. She retired from the role of the MCC Assistant to the Vice President, Educational Technology after 25 years of service. Marie has coordinated online faculty training, has developed and taught online courses for more than a decade, and her research interests are focused on online student retention. Marie earned her Bachelor of Music (B.M.) degree from the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, she earned her Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.) degree at the State University of New York at Brockport, and her Ed.D. was earned at the Margaret Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the University of Rochester.

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