Exemplary Online Services for Online Students Across the Globe

The convenience and popularity of online education has been expanding and contributes to increased demand for online student services. These services are necessary for students' successful registration for courses, access to academic services and support and completion of academic programs. A review of exemplary practices of implemented online services around the world is necessary in order to improve and increase availability of services for students enrolled in online programs. This review of literature will address the need for analysis and evaluate instances of exemplary and innovative offerings of online services for students enrolled in online programs.

Need for Analysis

Growing Online Student Population and Online Programs

The popularity of online programs in kindergarten through 12th grade education has grown exponentially within the past decade. From year-to-year, some states within the United States have reported growth of over 100 percent (p. 51, Basham, et al., 2013). Furthermore, researchers predict that 50 percent of courses in grades 9 through 12 will be delivered completely online by 2019 (p. 52, Basham et al., 2013). As the demand for this model increases, available, online support services are essential to students and their parents to ensure successful outcomes. As Toch (2010) explains, "students need more adult supervision in their lives, not less. They need as much help as possible in their emotional and social development during the course of their formal education" (p.72). The availability of online services is necessary to address this concern and maximize their success.

In recent years, the total enrollment of post-secondary courses have declined but registration in online offerings have increased. Studies suggest that online enrollments from 2011

through 2020 will increase 15 percent (p. 345, Gray, 2013). Due to growing interest and demand for online courses, there must be adequate online services available. As more programs become offered online, prospective students have many online programs to choose from. The technology-driven essence of online programs allows students to select programs from local institutions or from programs of other states, regions, or countries (p. 348, Gray, 2013). Highland Community College in Kansas experienced exponential enrollment growth in its online courses. This institution attributes its expansion to several factors including the ease of use of online resources and accessible online services such as online academic advisors (Crowder, 2010).

<div align="center">Retention of Students</div>

Retention of students, in all modalities of instruction, is a common concern of educational institutions. Attrition rates can be linked to the quality of education, thus, if attrition rates are high, it may damage the reputation of an institution (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Retention is also a concern among the student population. If a student drops from a course or program, he or she loses confidence in his or her ability to complete the academic program in addition to the financial loss of the tuition and fees and time spent working on coursework (Tinto, 2006).

When students are physically present on campus, institutions have more opportunities to address their concerns as it is easier to monitor students' needs. Therefore, it is important for institutions to address several areas for online students in order to address retention concerns. According to Cochran and Baker (2013),

> Institutions should: (1) develop policies and guidelines to provide increased support for and monitoring of students at the lower level, e.g. freshman and sophomores, who are enrolled in online courses; (2) develop policies and guidelines for students with lower cumulative GPAs (<3.0) that enroll in online courses in programs with more analytical or technical content, such as those in business, science and math; (3) be cognizant of gender differences in withdrawal rates in fields that have predominant gender roles as those in

the minority are more likely to withdraw; and, (4) follow-up with students when they first withdraw from an online class to mitigate future withdrawals (p. 46).

Due to the nature of the courses and programs and their mode of instruction, individuals who are required to contact students based on these strategies and policies would need to utilize online communication. The retention of students enrolled in online courses and programs is affected by is the institutional support to students. Research has found that online students require services and support from the institution for admissions, registration, tutoring, programs and policies (Gayton, 2013). Gayton (2013) explains that "administrators must understand that online students must have effective and efficient online support services, such as online course registration, online financial aid counseling, online tutoring, online training and orientation modules, and online remediation for at-risk students" (p. 152).

Services Available to Traditional Face-to-Face College Students

Library

Libraries are common fixtures at academic institutions around the world. They provide a place for students to study, research and provide a place to concentrate with limited distractions. The benefits accessible libraries are abundant. Research has found a positive correlation between the number of resources borrowed from libraries and students' academic success (Soria et al., 2017). Studies have also found that students relate libraries to school work and believe that they are part of a true academic experience. Libraries, as campus study spaces, foster learning behaviors important to students (Regalado & Smale, 2015).

Libraries provide students with valuable resources to support the success of their academic goals. As Soria et al. (2017) explains, "Most academic libraries feature the types of resources and materials (such as books and academic journals), study spaces, and group study rooms to support students' success and integration" (p. 9). Studies have found that students who

have borrowed resources from libraries are likely to be engaged in the academic endeavors, to develop critical thinking and reading/writing skills, and take part in scholarly activities (p. 20, Soria et al., 2017).

Technology Support

Technology support services provide students with assistance and resources for the use of campus networks, academic technologies, various software applications and hardware. First-year college students may need more assistance with login credentials, information on available resources and explanations of technology policies. Students, as Eichelberger and Imler (2015) explain, "may be familiar with academic technology, but as a whole, they are not experts, and many students have significant gaps in their skills that can affect their ability to succeed in their courses" (p. 337). Due to the need for improved information literacy skills, technology support services and resources are needed to assist students with their academic activities which require the use of technologies.

Generally, campus technology help desks are made available to students in various ways. Students are able to email support staff, call a dedicated phone number for support, and physical locations are available to students for face-to-face assistance. Help desk staff also often provide technology assistance within computer laboratories (p. 212, Bulchand-Gidumal & Melian-Gonzalez, 2009). Providing students with multiple means of accessing technology support services is necessary as the use of academic technologies, software and hardware are being utilized.

Advising

Student access to academic advising services is crucial for student retention. Advisors provide students with scheduling assistance, information on academic services and program

requirements. Advising centers maintain student portfolios which document students' personal and professional growth plans and provide professional feedback (p. 4, Dahl, 2004).

Health Services

College campus healthcare clinics provide medical and behavioral health services to students. Research has found that about 1500 health services exist on college campuses in the United States (p. 530, Turner & Keller, 2015). Turner and Keller (2015) explain that health services are especially necessary on college campuses as "congregate living, learning, and socializing promotes the spread of communicable illnesses, including respiratory pathogens such as mumps, meningococci, measles and many other viruses and bacteria…" (p. 536). For these reasons, health services are imperative for maintaining the well-being of students.

Tutoring

Tutoring services available on college campuses provide students academic assistance with comprehension and coursework of various disciplines. According to Bornstein (1993), tutors practice interpersonal skills, in order to build relationships, by "establishing rapport, building trust, motivating students, sharing each other's cultures, being a role model, appreciating cultural differences and understanding and coping with student frustrations" (p. 60). Tutoring services may be provided individually or in a group setting. Additionally, tutors address students' concerns related to "doing homework assignments, understanding directions, increasing self-confidence, working independently, thinking critically, understanding key ideas and expressing themselves in class" (p. 61, Bornstein, 1993).

Bookstores

Campus bookstores are a staple at most colleges and universities. They provide access to the necessary books and materials required to complete course work. College-level bookstores sign contracts with institutions' administration which require the retailers to ensure affordability

for the student body. Campus bookstores also manage the financial aid processes so that students can allocate aid to required educational material (para. 14, Raible & deNoyelles, 2015). Although most college campuses have private bookstores, faculty and students have the option to acquire and adopt educational materials from outside vendors, and online sources in order to utilize course materials from all possible repositories (para. 23, Raible & deNoyelles, 2015).

Digital textbooks (e-books) and other online publisher content are widely available in various disciplines, but the demand for printed text books remains. Chulkov and Van Alstine (2013) explain in their research that "students that used a printed textbook were more likely to report using the book for exploring captions and charts. Furthermore, most students strongly preferred the experience of using a printed textbook" (p. 216). As long as students have a preference of print over electronic material the demand for campus bookstores remains.

<div align="center">Offices of Specialized Services</div>

Disability support services at institutions of higher education provide accommodations to students with disabilities to provide access to course content and university services. The number of students with disabilities has dramatically increased in recent years. According to Abreu et al., (2016) explain that "55% [of students with disabilities] of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) sample reporting post-secondary enrollment after high-school" (p.323). Students with disabilities often utilize services for assistance with time management, organization, enhance executive functioning skills, intervening and communicating with professors and information regarding campus life (p. 325, Abreu et al., 2016).

Federal law, specifically the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, prohibits institutions (and all state and local governments), to discriminate against students with disabilities. Section 505 of this act requires that institutions "are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments. These adjustments will be considered only on request and are intended to

ensure equal educational opportunity" (p. 37, Katsiyannis et al., 2009). This requirement necessitates the existence of an Office of Specialized Services on all post-secondary school campuses.

Student Activities

Various activities and events on campus engage students with the campus community. These activities provide students with a sense of belonging and connectedness while they are away from home and their families or encountering new academic or social challenges. Walsh (2009) explains that "extra-curricular events are an important part of liberal learning and a way for students to gain exposure to a range of ideas, and to enhance their awareness of history and current events through face-to-lace interaction" (para. 12, Walsh, 2009).

Research suggests that social aspects of college life are related to the overall satisfaction with the college experience as a whole. Sirgy et al., (2007) argues that "the greater the satisfaction with the academic aspects of college life as well as satisfaction with the social aspects of the college the greater the satisfaction with college life overall" (p. 378). Opportunities for extra-curricular activities on college campuses are necessary to enhance the overall satisfaction with the college experience.

Examples of Exemplary Practices of Online Services Around the World

Online Counseling Services at Obafemi Awolowo University (Ile-Ife, Nigeria)

Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) instituted online guidance counseling services to students which is tailored to their online student population. OAU effectively researched their students' needs and determined that an online medium was necessary to address academic areas, career planning assistance, as well as health services and mental health counseling (Adebowale & Popoola, 2011). OAU's online services addressed concerns of students who may have been reluctant to seek out services.. Online counseling allows for faster progress as students and

counselors are able to pinpoint the causes of issues and spend less time socializing on unrelated topics (Ainsworth, 2004). By offering these services in an online modality, counseling specialists are easily accessible and can help students at OAU address personal challenges in considerable depth.

Obafemi Awolo University consulted with technical experts and counseling professionals to effectively implement online guidance counseling services to their students. Adebowale and Popoola (2011) researched the "availability and adequacy of human and material resources needed for effective online guidance and counseling services in the University" (p. 67). This allowed OAU to develop institutional procedures and guidelines for these services. The university's student population felt that the online services provided gave them "the opportunity to communicate freely with mental health professionals, to discuss issues that students might now want to discuss in face-to-face contact, since [there] would be greater identity protection" (p. 76, Adebowale & Popoola, 2011).

Online Technology Training at Kuwait University (Kuwait City, Kuwait)

Kuwait University realized a need to implement an online training platform for students to practice and develop necessary computer software application skills and technical skills. This compentence is utilized throughout students' academic careers at the university. Safar (2012) explains that research indicates that online training opportunities are profitable to Kuwait University for a number of reasons including: "1) arising performance results; (2) increasing time on tasks; (3) aggregating motivational levels; (4) heightening productivity; (5) escalating the number of persons trained, and (6) decreasing assessment anxiety for many learners/trainers" (p. 439). Furthermore, Safar (2012) suggests that self-paced and standardized delivery method of training material significantly reduces the demand for technical support and assistance which financially benefits the institution (p. 439).

Kuwait University's online technology training services are capable of catering to various learning styles and preferences including visual, verbal and auditory, reflective and observational mediums and of all skill levels (Hartel, 2010). KU's efforts to increase students' information literacy skills set the stage for other universities around the world. As Safar (2012) explains, institutions of higher education should "implement a well-planned and defined media awareness campaign, provide faculty with training on how to implement the online training system for their students, focus on content quality, usability and instructional design methodology, and facilitate training for higher level administration for program buy-in" (p.457).

Online Writing Resource Center at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia)

Monash University (MU) developed an online writing resource center to assist college students with academic writing, reading, listening, speaking, grammar and test taking strategies (Clerehan, 2003). Students enrolled in online courses benefit from the web-based resource platform's ability to conform to particular learning styles. The university's students are able to access the resource platform and progress through the content in a guided or self-guided path. Within the online resource center, students are able to virtually interact in an innovative ways. Clerehan (2003) explains that are "not only involved in independent learning, but also interact and socialize with other students, this promoting a sense of ownership" (p. 20).

An impressive enhancement to Monash University's online resource center is a design which accommodates English as a Second Language (ESL) students. MU is an institution whose student population consists of almost half from countries outside of Australia. Clerehan (2003) explains that "with such a large and diverse student population, systematic language and learning support can make a difference to students' progress and grades...the mission [of the university is] to integrate language and learning support into faculty teaching-for the benefit of all students" (p.16). Monash University made the imperative decision to incorporate the numerous variables in

supporting their student population including learning style, language background and learning

preferences (Henderson, 1996).

Online Disabilities Resource Repository for Institutions of Higher Education in Ireland

A professional organization, named "The Disability Advisors Working Network"

(DAWN), was developed to address the academic needs and career placement for students with

disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland (www.dawn.ie). This platform provides educators

access to valuable information regarding best practices for educating students with disabilities,

and interaction with professionals to assist with educating and placing students in careers.

According to Howlin et al. (2014), DAWN provides "a wealth of information regarding types of

disabilities and suitable accommodations but do not specify a framework for the completion of

needs assessments for students on work placements" (p. 559).

The Disability Advisors Working Network in Ireland addresses and supports the need for

institutions of higher education to design accessible academic content and to ensure that the

educational and career placement strategies are inclusive of all students (Hargreaves et al., 2014).

All institutions of higher education across the globe should strive to create and share an online

platform, like DAWN, to provide access to invaluable resources for students with disabilities and

for communication with professionals involved with higher education and disability services.

Online Tutoring for Educational Systems in China

VIPKID is an online tutoring platform which was developed as an educational resource

for students in China. Specifically, VIPKID uses online technologies to offer tutoring services to

Chinese speaking children. These Chinese students have synchronous access to English speaking

educators in the United States and Canada. Professional Chinese tutors are also part of the

platform to assist students to effectively learn and navigate the online tool (Sender, 2017).

Online tutoring platforms allow the students, who are learning English as a second language, to interact with educators who are native speakers of the English language. This promotes a cross-cultural learning community which has proven to be an effective learning model; meaningful social interaction facilitates effective learning and development for students at all levels (Lin & Yang, 2011). As Lin and Yang (2013) explain, "Incorporating computer technology into writing courses has become important in higher education, because it is widely agreed in the research literature that computer technology makes learning in online communities possible and thus facilitates foreign language teaching and learning" (p. 80).

Conclusion

Student services have been available to students at all levels from the advent of education, but due to increased online learning demand, fortification of online services is crucial. These services range from providing assistance with enrolling in specific courses to providing access to academic libraries. Communication and technology enhancements have expanded the capabilities of educational administrations to reach out to address student needs and focus on service design (p.29, Pittman, 2012). Academic services will need to be adapted to adequately serve students as familiarity with various student populations, teaching methodologies and educational resources increases. As online course enrollments rise, new online programs emerge, and as more students utilize various technologies, the creation and adoption of innovative online services are essential.

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