Online Learning Programs: Considerations

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Online Degree Programs

- 5.8 million students enrolled in online degree programs (Sundt et al., 2017)

- Online enrollments showing a growth of about 4% per year

- Numerous benefits (not limited by proximity, non-traditional students can benefit, programs help increase exposure for universities, etc.)

- Unique challenges (learners adapting to online environment, lack of community, anxiety, depression, lack of assistance, high attrition)

- Technology can be used to aid students in managing the challenges of studying in an online program

Online vs. Face-to-Face

- Online programs suffer from higher attrition rates
- Non-traditional students
  - May benefit the most due to erratic and familial obligations
  - Often not tech-savvy
  - Higher rates of attrition
  - Have difficulties adapting to online learning

Generational Differences

- Important to measure institutional approaches to ensuring success of students, especially Gen Z:
  - Baby Boomers – 1945 – 1965
  - Generation X – 1965-1980
  - Generation Y – 1981-1995
  - Generation Z – 1995 – 2010

Generational Differences

- Gen Y
  - Tech savvy
  - Prefer to communicate through electronic means (email, text, online webinars, etc.) than through traditional F2F methods
  - Digital natives (along with Millenials and Gen Z)

Generational Differences

- Gen Z
  - Tech savvy
  - Digital natives (along with Millenials and Gen Y)
  - Prefer to work and learn wherever they choose
  - Already connecting with people online
  - Social learners – establish friendships all over the world through collaborative tech
  - Tends to prefer individual work
  - Prefer flipped courses and relies on YouTube as a primary source of self-instruction

Generational Differences

- While colleges have adapted to their Millennial student populations, Gen Z students have different sets of needs, expectations, and experiences

- Colleges must consider the learning and social preferences of Gen Z students

- While digital natives, students could still use instruction on the proper use of learning technology

Connectiveness

- Students use technology to connect across geographical barriers

  - Students still need support navigating these tools and their uses

- Online students need to feel connected to be engaged

- Students use different media and technological tools to match their needed outcomes – there is no one-size-fits-all approach (nor should this be the approach of any institution)

Academic Success

- Mandatory online orientation programs may aid students in preparing for online degree programs, showing them how to use the tools they are provided with, and helping to instill a sense of community in new students

- Numerous time-management and financial apps that universities may provide to help students succeed (Mint, Quicken, etc.)

- Students should learn note-taking best practices (Refworks, Citefast, Endnote, OneNote)

Academic Success (continued)

- Cloud based storage can aid students (OneDrive, Google Drive, etc.)

- Students must be taught how to effectively use the LMS, otherwise the university may increase student cognitive load

- Analytics software can be used to improve student performance, providing numerous data points, and even identifying at-risk students (Canvas, Course Signals)

Support Services

- Integral part of any educational setting

- Serve students' academic, personal and social needs

- Can help students with program questions, technology issues, etc.

- Social clubs – online virtual clubs with a variety of focuses – help students feel like part of a community

Retention

- One of the top challenges of online programs
- Students expected to possess time management, technology, and other skills to complete online programs
- Students often feel disconnected from their peers, despite availability of tools such as Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, etc.
- One solution – Universities can use the diverse online communication & collaboration tools to bring students into closer contact
- Another solution – implement a mandatory online orientation session to provide new students with a consistent, shared new student experience

Orientation Programs

- Only 38% of reporting institutions mandated attendance in an online program

- Studies show that students who participate in online orientation programs find them valuable

- Helpful with international students, who often can't enter the country until 30 days before the semester starts

- Shown to increase persistence/decrease attrition in online students

Example Online Orientation Course

- Created in Canvas

- Let's go! >>> https://canvas.instructure.com/courses/1780291/