Online Orientation Course and Support Services for Online Graduate Students

Matthew Bonhamgregory
University of North Texas, USA
Matthew.Bonhamgregory@unt.edu

Leonardo Gonzalez
University of North Texas, USA
LeonardoGonzalez2@my.unt.edu

The final product of this project is a complete Canvas online orientation course for an online graduate program. While the orientation was designed for our UNT Learning Technologies Ph.D. program, it can be modified to suit any online degree program.

The course resides in the Canvas LMS and would be assigned to all new students admitted into the program. Our research showed us that many students enrolled in online degree programs are often unprepared for an online course of study. Students must be taught how to use the learning technology, and might also need some help with their writing, time management, and note-taking skills. These items are pointed out in the Resources for Your Journey section.

Further aid is provided through a regularly updated list of support resources and contacts. The course provides information about the overall program, to help the students understand what the expectations are. There is information containing resources available to them, for both their technological tools and personal contacts. There are sections for financial aid to help reduce the amount of financial stress the students may encounter. There is information about the general coursework the students are expected to complete. There is also a year-by-year journey laid out, so the students can know what to expect at each stage of the program. Separate sections focusing on student portfolio, candidacy, and dissertation help round out the program information. All of these resources are designed to help the students better understand their program so they are not surprised later in the process.

Additionally, research has shown us that many online students face higher anxiety and depression due to their disconnection from their peers and instructors. This lack of connection and feeling of belonging to a community leads to a higher rate of attrition in online courses versus their traditional face-to-face counterparts. To combat this high attrition, we've devoted sections of this lesson to peer forums, online communities, virtual clubs, and other avenues of social interaction. Aside from these items, the orientation program itself provides a common onboarding experience new students can share, further increasing their sense of belonging to the university community.

The below links provide some more information about the orientation program:

1. Course Link – this link will take you to the Canvas orientation course. While there are still some sections that need to be added, the outline has been created and enough information has been entered to give an impression of what it has to offer.

2. Video Tour – this link will provide a quick video tour of the orientation course.