Student Service Management in College Hybrid Learning Environment

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Abstract

This article exams the importance and promising practices in current college student services in the context of hybrid learning environment. Student service is a significant element to the persistence, development and success of college students and the contribution of student service to higher education management is alight with the development of technology. With the prevalence of hybrid learning in college and university, there exists challenges and opportunities for student service management. This article focuses on two main types of student services practices, introducing and exploring different cases of the platform-based practices and student and staff engagement-based models which are both important and promising in the context of hybrid learning of contemporary higher education.

Keywords

Student Service Management; Hybrid Learning; Digital Platform; Student-staff Engagement.

1.　Introduction

Student services professionals are integral to the success and persistence of college students and the contributions of student service to higher education management extend deep into the history and future of an enterprise that is both evolutionary and multifaceted. Learning support services have been shown to have a large impact on student retention[1] and play an important role in connecting students and institutions. Also, student services provide a sense of community and belonging for students, which combats isolation and thus enhancing student persistence including the increasing feeling of responsibility, loyalty, and openness to the college experience. Besides, by monitoring perceptions of campus programs, services, or environment, students service professionals are able to make a formative or summative evaluation of student learning and identify the needs of students, employers, or some other constituency, which leads to an intentional change to improve the students' studying experience and the community experience of higher education.

Information technology has influenced almost every teaching, learning, and management practice including student service management within higher education during the past decades. Some institutions reported offering only online access to services such as the college catalogue, course registration, class schedules, and financial aid applications. Institutions that used to rely on face-to-face interactions, standard mail, campus announcements, printed media, or automatic phone messaging systems now use Web sites, e-mail, instant messaging and chat functions, streaming video, social networking Web sites, and multiple other virtual venues to communicate with students.

Hybrid learning is a combination of online and face-to-face components in college teaching and learning. Online learning has been referred to as a type of distance education and as web-based learning, e-learning, and online education. Face-to-face learning means the traditional way of education that students and teachers gather in classrooms on campus and complete the

progress of learning at the same time and space. Digital technology plays an increasingly significant and complex role in college learning and hybrid learning is becoming popular and prevalent.

Technology has become an invaluable tool in providing services to students and has created incredible opportunities and practices. Regardless of format, it is important for student services professionals to remember the goal is the same: communication must be accurate and messages must reach intended recipients and accomplish intended goals. Professionals can now take advantage of the technology available to create hybrid student service and as a means of engaging students and facilitating success. Learning pedagogy emphasizes building connections to increase trust and relationships, and provide encouragement and safe exploration, which can result in a more successful learning experience. The same emphasis on connection can be applied to student services. Student services provide learning opportunities and support for success outside of the classroom, and student affairs professionals are encouraged to promote interactions that will support student needs separately.

From planning to implementing, to evaluating and revising, supporting students in a hybrid learning environment is a collaborative effort and should involve individuals from across campus while seeking to address administrative, academic, and personal services. Likewise, examining current and innovative practices from other institutions may assist professionals in creating quality programs for the success of online students at their own institution.

This article will discuss the importance of student services in hybrid learning and current popular and promising practices with the use of digital technology. In the first part, after examining the implications of student services for the success and development of college students, it comes to the opportunities for student services brought by technology, especially digital technologies in the Web 2.0. The article focuses on two main types of student services practices, introducing the platform-based practices and student-staff partnership models which are both popular and promising.

2. The Importance of Student Service in Hybrid Learning Environment

2.1. College Hybrid Learning Environment

Hybrid learning combines digital technologies and the traditional face-to-face model in college teaching and learning. At the end of the learning continuum, such face-to-face learning approach where educators conduct lectures without using the information technology in the physical classroom has been criticized as the least student-centered learning approach. Educators determine what the learners will learn, how they will learn, and how their performance will be evaluated. The face-to-face learning method provides students with less autonomy and flexibility for learning, hindering the development of lifelong learning and independent problem-solving skills of students. At the other end of the learning continuum, educators conduct lectures on the Internet without classroom teaching and face-to-face meetings, also known as e-learning and fully online learning method. Although e-learning method provides flexibility and time for learning as well as the reality of unbounded educational discourse, it has been considered as applying them merely for the sake of technology. Research studies have affirmed the values of information technologies in promoting student learning outcomes. For instance, Chen et al. reported a positive relationship between the use of web and internet technologies with learning, including the use of deep approaches to learning, higher gains in general education, and practical competence as well as personal and social development. [2] Educators are urged to meet the increasing demands and expectations for superior quality of learning results and experiences. To do so, practitioners are increasingly adopting hybrid learning, which utilizes and integrates the asynchronous (i.e., text-based Internet) with synchronous (i.e., face-to-face) learning experiences. Hybrid learning is a

pedagogical model that integrates the strengths of the traditional classroom environment in the physical world and the Internet learning activities in the virtual learning environment

The current hybrid learning introduced practice including hybrid courses, mooc, digitization of information, and the capability of synchronous and asynchronous communication. In hybrid learning, both instructors and students have online access to rich sources of data and increasingly sophisticated collaborative tools, which provide broader learning activities rather than mere meetings or classes where knowledge transfer between professionals and students. From the perspective of changing student groups, today's young generation of college and university students inhabit and populate hybrid worlds. Whether commuting to campus or living on campus in residence halls, students readily navigate and travel both real-world and online environments. Considering this reality, student service should also be integrated into the hybrid world.

2.2. Introduce New Student Service

There is a strong need for traditional colleges and universities to introduce new practices and strategies when providing student service in order to make a connection between student personal study and the institution. With the rapid growth of hybrid learning, an observable gap arises in the conflict between the expectations and needs of the flexibility of hybrid learning and traditional student support services, which are often limited to normal institutional business hours and practices. Various available technologies used in hybrid courses allow an instructor to increase the pace of learning, deepen it with web content, and provide greater structure and more frequent feedback from the students. There are also professional digital platforms and e-resources bases generated by formally structured organizations. Our students who inhabit and grow in the hybrid effortlessly facilitate themselves with the technologies in their professional and social lives.

The free or relatively inexpensive costs of hosting websites and free access to networking via social media also promoted technology-based professional development resources that emerge organically from like-minded groups of individuals. Hybrid learning community, assessment, and evaluation result in the potential increased efficiency of learning, teaching, and administrative processes. Social media, internet-based tools that promote collaboration and information sharing, can be used in academic settings to promote student engagement and facilitate better student learning. The development of student services technology plan is critical to the success of online services and should be part of every college's enrollment management strategy. Today's student service professionals must be mindful to reach out to students in the hybrid higher education environment.

Hybrid learning also makes the engagement of learning more complex for both teachers and students because of the diversity of tools, resources, communication ways, etc. used in the process of teaching and learning. In this context, student service provided by college or university staffs needs to introduce models and practices that help students engage in the process of learning more efficiently. In addition, faculty or departments adopting online components of instruction will require both technological and pedagogical training, such as the use of e-conferencing system, ways to assess student progress, conversion of lectures to online formats, facilitating online discussion forums, developing professor and student rapport and managing the online workload. Instructors may fear an increased workload, since using online elements will obviously require retraining for most faculty members, and the style of instruction is unfamiliar to many instructors. Also, considering that technology changes rapidly, those training will need to be ongoing.

3. Platform-based Practices of Hybrid Student Service

3.1. Online Student Service Platform

Information and technology support may be provided as an information center, a technical helpdesk, or a call center [3]. Regardless of format, it's important to be reliable and helpful through easy means and provide students with accurate and timely information and clear instructions, at least have a certain amount of simultaneous access time and subsequent coverage. Working with the information services platform, an individual student portal system can also be constructed to simplify the student experience, simplify the number of separate pages and logins required by the organization, and streamline the learning experience for students[4]. Portals can also provide personalized services while integrating online interactions. For example, students can view personalized dashboards on their profiles in which provide key resource links, personalized account holdings, learning plans, and advisory information, curriculum, etc. With the advent of era of big data, data generated in the process of students' learning activities which was wasted in the past can be easily collected and analyzed. Extracting different types of data from students' records of participating in various student support services and adding personalized dimensions to the management of information and data can thus improve students' user experience.

In the case of a hybrid help desk, students may ask about hybrid courses within the learning management system itself but also general technical support. Beyond having staff available to directly diagnose a problem and provide a solution, a knowledge base, handbook, and other information, such as a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page, is good practice in order to direct technical expertise and resources toward more complex issues. For online student services when staffing may be limited in terms of hours or human resources overall, it may be especially important to provide information online for students to access independently 24/7 before contacting college staff.

The establishment of online student service platforms by different departments, divisions, or course teams also brings redundancy between platforms. Students may need to register different online accounts to log in to separate platforms, the incompatibility between the platforms also reduces the efficiency of the use of information and data, which is contrary to the original intention of the information service platform to provide a better teaching experience and harvest, which requires better cooperation and resource sharing between different departments, colleges and teams of colleges or universities. Digital student service platforms would not replace the face-to-face service but function as a tool for students to facilitate themselves. They can also use it to make face-to-face service appointments which means the hybrid approaches here improve the efficiency of service arrangement through data operation and make it possible for student service across space and time.

3.2. Virtual Library

Virtual library support is an important component of student support services in higher educational institutions. An increase in online and hybrid programs, plus the increase in digital information and archives being more and more readily available for learners, has required librarians to reevaluate the ways they manage and distribute resources and services.[5] Vast amount of information possible online often means an increased need for information literacy, to some degree, there has been a transform of the librarian from traditional information keeper and provider to educators.

While providing physical space for students, using virtual library access and evaluating resources helps students be more successful in their hybrid learning, and interactions with library staff can increase the e-learners' sense of connectedness to their library and campus. Professional skills training may be provided through webinars, personalized text or video chats,

phone calls, or emails. Websites are often be customized to make information easy to access as well, making librarian knowledge conveniently available to learners 24/7. Libraries should make students feel immersive in the atmosphere of professional skills training and development, and typical examples exist such as weblogs or FAQs and embedded or linked website multimedia, such as instructional videos on research.

A user-centric information-seeking and sense-making system can be added to the construction of a virtual library, providing users with contextual information based on their information needs in a way that both makes sense to them and shape their information seeking. As with these services, students, and faculty or staff, may turn to convenient digital resources and services regardless of course format. The digital delivery of content increases flexibility, portability, and availability of content. Additionally, libraries may provide subscription and training on accessing subscription-based and open-source databases hosted online. In addition to online services, some colleges provide their students with access to physical resources through collaborating with other, closer to the student higher education institutions for the use of their physical libraries. Others may use the postal service to deliver and return, content to the distant learners.

4. Engagement-based Practices in Hybrid Student Service

4.1. Student-staff Partnership in Courses

Students and staff engaging together as partners throughout the learning and teaching are gaining prominence internationally. Cook-Sather et al. define *partnership* as a process, characterized by collaboration and reciprocity[6], through which there is no longer a hierarchy between students and teachers, but rather all participants have the opportunity to conceptualize, make decisions, implement, investigate, or analyze curriculum as well as instruction equally but in different ways. Whereas Web 1.0 is considered a content-centric paradigm, Web 2.0 is considered a social-centric paradigm. In other words, at the heart of Web 2.0 is social networking. These types of social learning technologies can be used to build flexible and agile learning environments and foster collaborative learning activities for students.

There are a number of classifications in the literature of the different ways in which students may act as partners in learning and teaching in higher education[7]. These exciting practices value the contribution of students, along-side those of staff, in defining and enacting solutions to enhance teaching quality in ways that extend beyond drawing on students as a source of institutional data. Engaging students as co-teachers, co-researchers, and co-creators, they embody 'students as partners' practices and demonstrate how students and staff can work together in non-traditional 'student' and 'lecturer' roles to enhance the core functions of higher education: learning and research.

The Student-staff partnership model works in the direct cooperation of students and teachers by allowing student counselors to work with staff to design learning activities for introductory subjects. Teachers also work with students in the course to provide alternative interpretations of course materials, while supporting learning habits during the critical first-year transition to higher education. Structured approaches that position students as consultants introduce an open dialogued interaction between students and staff about teaching as it unfolds in real-time. Engaging students and staff together and making them share responsibility and goals pushes the boundaries of how universities typically involve students in teaching and learning.

4.2. Online Orientation Courses Student Vetting

To recognize and address student and instructor concerns and increase student success, instructors can provide an online orientation to explain the content and structure of this course, focusing on not only technical skills but also appropriate expectations, netiquette, support

resources, and assessing online learning readiness. Both populations of students and instructors reach an agreement about the importance of appropriate time expectations and time management skills, and both groups should agree that students need to honestly assess their interests, commitment and abilities before enrolling in a hybrid course.

It is important potential students make an informed decision by understanding the needs and demands of online learning in general, and their program in specific, and are able to assess their personal fit. Many institutions use self-assessment tools to encourage learners to check for readiness, verify technical minimums are met, and that the student has appropriate career goals. To verify readiness and alignment of goals, academic advising, and career counseling are also used to address motivation and preparing the student for expedient completion or transfer.

4.3. Social Media in the Learning Community

For the past decade, social media has been a tool for building communities of practice, teaching, learning, and networking in medical education[8]. Learners' experience and exploration with social media was largely an unsupervised and independent activity. Learning in the context of social media has become an integral part of the academic experience. Social media are defined as a variety of online applications that develop on the technological and ideological basics of Web 2.0. These Internet-based applications facilitate human communication, interaction, and collaboration by allowing exchange and creation of user-generated content Various recent studies revealed that students have steadily increased the use of social media for communication, creative expression, and coursework-related collaboration. Other studies showed that educational institutions are progressively implementing social media to support learning and teaching activities.

Colleges and universities, wary of the way social media can blur the lines between personal and professional identities, produced guidelines and curricula to orient students to ethical, legal, and privacy concerns. Multiple Adaptations articles highlight educators no longer reacting to trainees' use of social media but instead supervising them in how to use it as a tool to educate patients and society. Social media has evolved from a tool for learning from colleagues and forming online communities of practice to a platform for communicating professional values, connecting to society, and advancing population health. Reflecting on students' creation of epidemiology bulletins, noted that 'this experience allowed new ways of teaching and learning through the use of education technologies that are currently made use of in daily life, but are sometimes little explored by teachers effectively'. The Adaptations articles demonstrate how teachers can lead this exploration for students.

5. Conclusion

The student services field has evolved considerably since its beginnings as a diminutive but supportive partner in higher education. Following several decades of recent developments, it can be argued that the field has emerged as a solid presence in the higher education enterprise and has become a significant instrument in creating hybrid institutional environments that nurture student success on campus. Evidence of this status is perhaps best reflected in the work of construction of digital student service platforms and the developing student-staff partnership in learning engagement. The achievements of these broad-based practices offer a promising future for student service management in college and university where there the hybrid learning have been an irreversible trend.

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