Chapter 92
Pursuit of Online Services for Online Students

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of university students are studying online. Distance learning enrollment in global higher education has increased dramatically in the past two decades due to the ubiquity of technology, increasing diversification and globalization, and use of new advanced technology. The development of online learning programs has focused primarily on implementing educational technology to deliver academic content while enhancing the online learning experience. A significant element for the success of distance education programs is the provision of student support services that are appropriate to the unique needs of distance learners. Technology has facilitated this new era in global higher education making the utilization of technology essential to provide university support for online clients. Student support services are all kinds of services other than the coursework rendered by the institutions to online students/learners to facilitate their success.

INTRODUCTION

The escalation of online students continues unabated into the fourth decade without any evidence of peaking (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Adult learners, however, are no longer solely the domain of the non-traditional learner as more traditionally-aged students (i.e., 18-24 years old) are splitting their time be-

tween study and work, and therefore, expecting more flexible online learning options and as well as more student support services (Shea & Bidjerano, 2016). Beyond the value of online learning as a convenient, flexible option for those managing competing priorities, Allen and Seaman (2015) pointed to the 'Millennial Generation' as a growing consumer of online education as a preferred learning mode on the basis that it is more aligned with the need to possess digital skills, in addition to convenience and flexibility.

BACKGROUND

Technology is providing a global interconnectedness that reshapes educational, social, economic and cultural life (Chan, Mense, Crain-Dorough, Richardson, & Lane, 2013). Globalization permits HEIs to expand their economic horizons by marketing new techniques for the delivery of services to all their students, specifically their online students (Connor & Rabovsky, 2011). A power shift is occurring in HE, driven by two trends: (a) the increased freedom of learners to access, create, and re-create content; and (b) the opportunity for learners to interact with each other outside of a mediating agent (Lemoine & Richardson, 2019). Information access and dialogue, previously under control of the educator, can now be readily accessed by online learners (Flavin, 2016).

Given the tremendous employment and financial benefits that accrue to those with postsecondary credentials, providing greater access to educational resources is essential (Bendixen & Jacobsen, 2017). While traditional brick-and-mortar institutions provide one viable and valuable path to postsecondary education, there is a need for more and more varied venues for learners, particularly those learners who are place- or time-bound due to work, family, or other commitments, to obtain HE (Allen & Seaman, 2011; Srivastava, Gendy, Narayanan, Arun, & Singh, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Learning

Online learning has become a core educational delivery method at most institutions of HE (HEIs); in fact, 66% of chief academic leaders reported that online learning is critical to their long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Online learning has grown tremendously over the past decade. In May of 2017, over 6.1 million students were enrolled in at least one online course and 31% of all HE learners took at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

For an increasing number of learners, online learning creates the most viable venue with the flexibility to meet their learning needs. With this rapid expansion of network access worldwide, vast arrays of distance learning programs permit educators to reach a more globally diverse clientele (Kuong, 2015). Advancements in technology have created opportunities for HEIs to extend educational opportunities beyond the traditional 'brick and mortar' buildings and deliver educational services to geographically and culturally diverse audiences internationally (Alfonso & Garcia, 2016).

Once viewed as an anomaly on the mainstream campus, distance education has become an accepted and oftentimes expected delivery system for academic content. Separation of the teaching and learning behaviors as well as the physical separation of instructors and learners is a major source of the discomfort and suspicion with which many in HE view distance education (Crosling, Nair, & Vaithilingam, 2015).

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