

Chapter 17

Institutional Support for First-Year Students

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ABSTRACT

Higher institutions of learning enroll first-year students in various academic programs. Owing to the challenges that students face, a good number do not complete their course. Student support to the first-year student is therefore quite critical and must not be left to chance. Most institutions have well organized support systems that are anchored on the student affairs division. This chapter takes the reader through the nature and scope of institutional support available to first-year students. This literature review established that most institutions have personnel divisions in place, and they offer support to first-year students. Incorporating parents in supporting students is helpful. Finding may inform counseling staff to develop early intervention programs.

INTRODUCTION

Researches indicate that majority of the students joining institutions of higher learning are in their early 20's (Hassel & Riduot, 2018). These students join the institutions mostly having qualified from secondary education. The change can be a major source of anxiety to first year students (Briggs et al, 2012) even as they come in full of expectations and excitement about the university life (Hassel & Riduot, 2018). It is important to note too that others join universities as mature entries and with families to cater for (imbid). The experience becomes even more complex for those students coming in as first generation or from minority groups or with lower entry point. The various challenges that all these students encounter as they go through their social and academic life and the accompanying distress and low academic performance, propel a good number towards dropping out especially if they do not find any support from the institution (Hassel & Riduot, 2018).

Institution of higher learning (IHL) is a term used for college, university, technical or business schools or similar institutions empowered by legally constituted bodies to offer post-secondary education Chigwada (2021). The IHL have the mandate of producing holistic and value oriented citizens capable

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-6961-3.ch017

of driving sustainable development in their communities (Ekena & Oluoch-Suleh, 2015). In fulfilling the aforementioned goal, they are expected to go beyond their skills training mandate and undertake additional responsibilities (United Nations Academic Impact [UNAI], 2022). According to UNAI, IHL have the responsibility of working around the complexities, crises and emergencies experienced in the society to provide valuable solutions while at the same time ensuring continuity between different educational levels. UNAI proposes the need for IHL to restructure their curriculum to meet the societal expectations and equip all their students with the capacity to navigate their environments better. These institutions admit new students who qualify for further education and therefore are expected to complete and join in building their communities. The newly admitted students are referred to as first year students (Akpan, 2016).

According to Van der Zanden (2018), first year lays the foundation for later learning. Baik et al (2017) observe that first year is significant in ensuring students' success, retention and academic persistence. It therefore requires a firm foundation for any cohort to stand out. According to Pelletier (2018), if the foundation is not properly laid, quite a good number of these newly admitted students may drop out. Baik et al further explain that the escalation in the rate of dropout could be as a result of coping difficulties encountered by the freshmen. No wonder in Canada, (Staff Writers, October 22, 2021) it was observed that 30% of first year students failed to enroll in second year owing to several challenges and the number further increased in second year to about 40%. Similar findings were established from a study in Australia by Baik et al. They observed among low grade entry university students, a higher dropout rate. Owing to the aforementioned, Baik et al recommended the need to rethink the role of preparatory programs and support for students to enable development of personal objectives, identity and assistance towards personal adjustment. The fore going can be achieved through support given the students by their various institutions.

Institutional support refers to a set of policies, practices, physical facilities, software, or processes, made available by the organization to enable successful learning (IGI Global, 2022). Van der Zanden (2018) outlines three predictors of first year students' success as academic achievement, critical thinking and socio-emotional wellbeing. Pelletier (2022) reiterated that success in learning must be perceived from the students' view point, such that interventions, institutional goals and impact of the institutional activities are designed to favour student's success. This implies therefore that considerations must be made to ensure that each generation of students benefit from the support. Generations come in and go, with each having their unique characteristics. Noteworthy, the current first year students belong to the Z generation (born in the mid 1990-2010) and are described as digital oriented. This calls for formulation of relevant support system that can help in meeting students' current needs (Ochoa & McCrary, 2021). Ochoa & McCrary observes that the current generation has a high and changed expectation of the IHL which must thus be taken into consideration if efforts are to bear any fruit. In line with the foregoing, it is important that IHL revisit from time to time their support portfolio with a view to making them relevant.

In this chapter the author takes you through the nature and scope of institutional support available to first year students'. Being a conceptual study, the chapter contains reviewed empirical literature on the nature and scope, origin and history, theoretical perspectives and common service divisions for students' support. Using accredited search engines, this book chapter will employ document analysis as the research methodology. Articles will be systematically sampled from the existing literature on first year student support in higher institutions of learning. The secondary data search will be centered on peer reviewed articles, conference papers, research reports, social media articles like blogs and dissertations. Data will be analyzed thematically. This literature review established that most institutions have personnel divi-

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