Online Student Support Services
A Best Practices Monograph

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This Month's Feature Article

Whether you're creating your first Student Support website or you're a veteran, take a look at Website Planning and Development, a Monograph article from Helen Torres of San Antonio College.

Highlighting the work that created her own college's award winning site www.accd.edu/sac/online, Ms. Torres also explores support options for the smaller college - from using student assistants to field help desk questions to sharing website responsibilities among a small ad hoc committee.

Once you've completed the article, browse any of the areas on the menu. And keep watching - new sections will be added on a regular basis.

What You'll Find Here

This Monograph is designed to help you plan and view examples of the best applications of student support strategies for online students available.

Keeping in mind that the needs and resources of individual colleges differ tremendously, from the smallest rural institutions to large, multi-campus districts, it is hoped that you'll find strategies and applications here that will be of value as you plan your own program.

And if you don't? Well, this is a work in progress so use the Contact link to send your recommendations for best practices and your own best practice websites in for consideration in future updates.

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Introduction

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Colleges that teach at a distance must be able to offer the student and library services for a successful online experience. For more than a century, the higher education model has remained relatively stable. Yet, with the advent of the information age and globalization, changing demographics are driving today's trends in student services. What we have grown accustomed to is being challenged, forcing us to adapt to this rapidly changing environment. Perhaps, the most dramatic changes are occurring in how we deliver services to the distance learner.

Distance education students need the same kinds of services as on-campus students but expect the services to meet their needs for flexibility and convenience. To meet these evolving needs—colleges are creating innovative ways to reach their distance learners with student support.

By examining the shift in the delivery of student services from a traditional to a more integrated model, this Online Monograph of Student Support Services will provide strategies and best practices for student support. The best practices described have been developed by a cadre of student support community college professionals with extensive experience in the creation and delivery of services to online students.

With the severe budget cuts to education over the past few years and with the elimination of a number of discretionary funding sources, many colleges have been stopped "dead in their tracks" as far as the further development of their online student support goes. We hope that this Online Monograph of Student Support Services will serve as a springboard to encourage colleges to increase the success of their online students.

The project team and selected authors of the Monograph's sections share a variety of effective uses of people, technology, and processes in the student services field so there are exemplary practices within this document for everyone. Best practices in the Online Monograph will also demonstrate community college efforts to provide support services designed to increase student success.

Subject matter for the Online Monograph includes innovative applications for both web-based freshman and distance
learning course orientations, financial aid, library access, career planning, student news, and testing. The collection of best practices have been assembled in a manner that should allow readers to quickly identify innovative online support services and practices that are specific to certain student areas.

This online publication has been created as a part of the project, Online Student Support at Every College, based at Tyler Junior College and supported by the Northeast Texas Consortium of Colleges & Universities. During the first year of this grant, this project has partnered with community colleges and professionals throughout Texas who have been identified as leaders providing online student services. The project has worked closely with the Texas Center for Online Instruction; the Texas Collaboratives for Teaching Excellence in Professional Development; Curriculum Development, and Recruitment and Retention; the Virtual College of Texas, the Counselors Network; Texas Rural Community College Network; the North Texas Community College Consortium; and other Carl D Perkins projects.

In partnership with Coastal Bend College, Tyler Junior College has developed regional workshops to showcase exemplary student service offerings for online students. The Junior and Community College Student Personnel Association of Texas, co-sponsored a regional workshop on Best Practices for Online Student Support @ Every College.

This project has been developed by the Texas State Leadership Professional Development and funded by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Carl D. Perkins Act.
Website Planning and Development

Helen Torres
San Antonio College

Planning and developing a website for online student support is a critical requirement for ensuring student success and retention. The website facilitates student access to support services that are necessary for them to be successful in college, and it affords students comparable access to the same support services available to students on campus. A student services website ensures compliance with regulatory requirements of online programs. This chapter will 1) explore procedures necessary for planning and developing a website; 2) explore the technology considerations and infrastructure needed to ensure website success in the delivery of online student services; and, 3) identify the personnel needed to plan and develop a successful website for online student services. It is difficult to prioritize the importance of procedures, technology, or people as all of the outlined steps are interdependent for understanding the framework of successful website planning.

The first model used will be of a large institution—San Antonio College (SAC). SAC is the largest single campus community college in Texas. It generates 24,000 credit students each semester. San Antonio College Online (SAC Online: www.accd.edu/sac/online) is part of San Antonio College, providing a comprehensive online degree program that began in 1996. The program offers over 230 online courses, 17 video courses, blended courses, and interactive video conferencing courses; it generates approximately 19,000 annual enrollments. The SAC Online Model will be used as one possible model that can be replicated in large, medium or small institutions by varying the methodologies to accomplish the same goal—successful website planning for student success and retention. Prairie View University, the University of Puerto Rico, San Jacinto College and numerous other community colleges have adopted some of the program features of SAC Online. Institutions inevitably will adjust the model based on the resources available, varying expertise and personnel capacities, and other factors.

Procedures to Website Planning and Development

Procedures can be defined as the process used to coordinate the effort of website planning and development. To attain successful website development, one needs to examine the larger framework of program success and recognition within the institution. There should be a connection between the Distance Education Program and the mission of the institution. For example, San Antonio College Online is embedded in the college mission because it expands access to higher education. (San Antonio College’s Mission Statement: San Antonio will provide responsive
education through excellence, accessibility and diversity...). All of the goals of the SAC Online Program are connected and supported by the college mission. This is a critical beginning point to justify budgetary needs and technology infrastructure to accomplish the program's goals. Another requirement for program success that leads to successful website planning and development is the organizational structure. There needs to be a leader tasked to accomplish the program goals. In some institutions, it is a Distance Learning Coordinator, Director, or Dean. This individual needs to have a vision to move the program forward, and the vision needs to be recognized and supported by the organization.

For practical purposes, we will assume that such a leader is in place at the institution to enable successful website planning and development. One approach is to form a committee representative of the areas that you want to develop in the website. For example, it is recommended that the Development Committee include a webmaster, a librarian, a counselor, a tutor, an admissions staff person, a technical Help Desk representative, several online students, an American Disabilities Act (ADA) representative, an assessment staff member, and staff from financial aid, marketing/public relations, online faculty, department chairs, and any other college unit that you want to reflect in the website. These representatives will guide the DE leader in the development of the content areas for the website. The added benefits of this approach include a cohesive website, consensus from within the institutional units, and the acknowledged responsibility from the various departments to update and maintain their various links.

The Development Committee needs to have a chair that is task oriented and able to lead the group to accomplish the single task of planning and developing the website. The chair needs to establish timelines for: 1) outlining the general framework of the website; 2) researching and gathering information for each of the content areas based on student needs; 3) writing and editing the content areas (with participation from online students and the public relations office), 4) building the website features, dealing with appearance, navigation, clarity, market appeal; and 5) launching the website. Upon developing the website, it is strongly suggested that a review committee made up of members not involved in the development review the website for the aforementioned features. The review team should include: online students to provide feedback using a set criteria that will inform you if the website does what you intended for it to do. The team may also include English department and/or other faculty to check the content areas of the website for syntax, clarity, and style.

The Development Committee should plan to reconvene as needed to review, revise or update the website. An individual should be identified as a webmaster to maintain the established site for online student support. This individual should work with the respective student services units to ensure that the links to their specific content areas are current and clear to students. This is often a difficult task as unit personnel often do not have the expertise to make the changes themselves or the time to update their respective content areas. Therefore, the assigned website manager or webmaster should have sound working relationships with the respective units to facilitate cooperation and collaboration in website maintenance.

Technology and Personnel Considerations for Website Planning and Development

The technology used to plan and develop a website will be determined by the resources of the institution. In an institution such as San Antonio College, there may be a college webmaster, a Technology Center, an Instructional Innovation Center, a district office with technologists available to the college, and other related resources making it possible for a website to be planned, developed, and launched within months. At other types of institutions, the time period for creating the site may be longer, depending upon the college's infrastructure and the breadth of the website.
In spite of the resources and personnel available, numerous obstacles can surface along the way. Meetings will have to take place with the respective departments, requesting that each unit participate and assign representatives who would take on additional responsibilities.

Although San Antonio College departments collaborated with the Distance Education Department, consensus building was laborious and required time for the units to understand the global significance for the institution to establish the student support services website. One approach is to explain to the units responsible for developing the content areas about the regional accreditation agency’s and the state’s Higher Education Coordinating Board’s criteria for distance education programs.

If an institution has extremely limited resources, they can accomplish the goal of planning and developing the website by hiring an outside consultant to do the design and layout; however, the college should still have an assigned Website Development Committee responsible for organizing and/or writing the content areas. Hiring a consultant will ensure a professional look to the website. The costs to the institution will be a worthy investment as the website will have market appeal and accomplish the goals of a good online student services website. The institution needs to identify a technologist that can maintain the website upon development and make the necessary updates as needed.

Technical Infrastructure. An institution also has to consider infrastructure and server capability for launching the website. How much memory and storage will the website require? At what networking speed does your server connect to the internet and how sufficient is that for your applications? Should you host the website on a campus server or outsource it to an external company? In many situations, the server decisions will be made by an information technology division. However, particularly in smaller institutions you will want to consult with the information technology group before initiating, and throughout the creation of the site.

Software. The webmaster and or designer will need to consider the software to design the website. The original layout and design should be flexible and easy to modify. If the software is not flexible, the webmaster will have technical problems when broad modifications are needed due to directional change, program growth, added links, etc. These considerations need to be anticipated because they will occur. A website for online student services is fluid as student needs may change from year to year.

Making software decisions for an online services website is critical. Some questions to ask are: How interactive should the website be? What are the costs to make the website interactive? Can the institution afford it? Is there an alternative way to provide interactive student services online? Who will pay for the costs—the institution, the district office, the department?

Interactivity. Another consideration in the technical design of the website is addressing whether the website will be highly interactive. For example, if the website is designed to inform students about online student services, there should be links to: application, counseling, financial aid, tutoring, orientation to online learning, testing, library services, student success strategies, and others as needed. The links should, by e-mail or other means, connect the student and the respective department staff. When a student is seeking online counseling, the most basic approach would be to post the counselor’s email address and provide an Ask a Counselor link to allow the student to email a question(s) and the counselor will respond within an established response time (Example: 24 to 48 hours).
Some students may not be comfortable with e-mail based advisement because the discussion is not spontaneous and the student may lose interest in seeking advice, course information or personal advice given the time delays for getting a response. Thus, a counselor could use special meeting software with live chat and presentations. Products such as *Elluminate* or *Horizon Wimba* allow counselors to have a highly interactive conversation with a student. Although pricey, valuable features can include real time chat and voice/audio capabilities. Other features may allow students to click on an icon to raise their hand when they have a question, simulating the protocol that one would typically find in a face to face classroom setting. Only the counselor or facilitator can grant the student permission to speak. The student can also email the counselor while they are having the session. Online meeting software is gaining wide-spread use for teaching content areas, teaching library services online, and for online counseling.

**Training Needs.** Who will train the staff and faculty? The institution also has to have resources to train staff and faculty to use the web resources effectively. If an institution has a *faculty lab for professional development*, (Ex. San Antonio College has an Instructional Innovation Lab specifically for faculty professional development, online course development and for teaching pedagogical teaching strategies) courses could be offered to faculty to improve online student support services, enhance interactive teaching, and to serve students more effectively through instantaneous communications. Otherwise, individuals within Student Services, Distance Education, or other areas will need to be given the responsibility for professional development.

**Budgeting.** Can the institution sustain the program without the software and other technology? Is the software needed *a priority* in the college technology plan? In the unit plan....In the budget? The related resources for successful website planning and development should be part of the college’s priorities. A successful distance education program which includes a successful website should be supported college wide. It should be something that the institution wants. The needs should be identified and woven into the technology plan, the department plan, and the college or division budget.

**San Antonio College Online Model**

San Antonio College Online, a *best practice* to website planning and development included a number of procedures, technology considerations/support and personnel, including:

- The appointment of the existing Online Advisory Committee to serve as the Website Development Committee and establish specific timelines to plan and develop the website. The SAC Online Advisory Committee consists of faculty, students, librarians, counselors and staff. Its purpose is to work with the Director of Distance Education, the Dean of Evening, Weekend and Distance Education, and the Executive Vice-President and President to implement initiatives that will further develop and improve *SAC Online*.

- The SAC Online Advisory Committee and college president asked the college webmaster to design the layout of the website.

- The content areas were written and organized by the respective units.

- The DE Director and the College Webmaster worked jointly to organize the content areas and links.

- The President and DE Director prepared a *welcome* using video streaming that is on the Welcome Page of the SAC Online website. Its purpose is to personalize the welcome to prospective SAC Online students.

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/website.htm

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The DE Director and the Webmaster presented the final website to students for review and assessment of navigation ease, and other website features.

The finished website was also presented to the SAC Online Advisory Committee for review, discussion, and further editing.

Upon completing final edits, the College uploaded the SAC Online website on the district server of the Alamo Community College District in April 2004. The old links of the initial Distance Education website were routed to the new website: www.accd.edu/sac/online.

San Antonio College purchased the software Eluminate to use for online counseling, online library services, online teaching, and to hold college-wide meetings.

San Antonio College appointed department webmasters to maintain website information departmentally.

The College Webmaster is responsible for ensuring that departmental websites are maintained up to date, show appropriate information, etc. Established guidelines are in place. San Antonio College's SAC Online website is a "best practice" and it follows established national guidelines for web design and planning: American Council on Education and the Best Practices and Tools for Adult Learners by the Aslian Group: Experts in Adult Learning.

This best practice allows departments to manage departmental information and removes the overall responsibility from the college webmaster. It also places responsibility on every department to keep the websites updated. This balanced responsibility generally works. However it is an on-going responsibility to ensure that departmental websites maintain a professional appearance, include only relevant information, are not used for consulting, advertisements of a personal nature, etc. The Alamo Community College District (ACCD) supports the colleges' efforts by maintaining a district wide Information Technology Planning Council that reviews legal issues related to technology, computer usage, and college website design and guidelines information. The ACCD website provides district employee's access to its Web Publishing Policy and Procedures via an e-portal system. The document provides an overview, oversight responsibility, and acceptable use policies.

**Alternative Website Planning & Development Options for Medium and Small Colleges**

Institutions that are struggling to develop online student support services through a website to 1) help students, or 2) comply with accreditation and/or state principles or criteria, generate program growth, or meet current student demand, can implement alternative options:

- Colleges can develop a website with online services such as counseling or library services that may use email instead of interactive software; however the emails should be replied to within 48 hours at a minimum, and within 24 hours if possible.

- A Frequently Asked Questions Website can be developed based on documented logs collected during the day. The site can replace a help desk in the evening and on weekends when staff may not be available. For example, the University of Minnesota Find an Answer FAQ is of this type and logs the number of times a
particular question is asked. See http://admissions.tc.umn.edu/answers/index.html. Minnesota State Community and Technical College has a "best practice" FAQ link located on its home page at http://www.mnstate.edu. The FAQ's are broken down into five main topic areas for ease of searching.

- Online assessment can be accomplished with proctored testing locally, and at remote sites. This strategy works if an institution does not have secured testing software.

- Student assistants can be trained to field help desk questions. Students sometimes prefer assistance from their peers. However there should be systematic and thorough training before staff or students answer a help desk.

- The website can reside on a campus server instead of a district server and site maintenance can be done by a small Ad Hoc Committee, if the institution does not have a designated college webmaster or departmental webmasters.

- The website can be simple and have only the most viable links to begin with. Later the website can be further organized as the program grows and more links are needed.

- Institutions that do not have a webmaster, can hire a consultant to design the website initially or identify one or several students in the college's web design classes. Web site development could be an internship project for students.

National Trends in Website Design

National trends of website planning and design consultants recommend that institutions should focus on the following principles or criteria in developing a website:

- Websites should be clear, well organized and easy to navigate.

- Website links should work and load quickly.

- Websites should reflect information that students need to be successful.

- Websites should reflect a welcoming image for your institution.

- Websites should reflect images of your students.

- Websites should have a search button allowing for specific related searches.

- Websites should be reviewed periodically for needed updates.

- Content should be well organized.

- They should include special portals for the community, the media and others as needed.
The website should also include up to date events or news related to student services.

It should include minimal clicks to access the needed information.

These principles of website development represent a set of criteria that can be used to plan and develop a website. The Website Development Committee should be willing to serve between 5-12 months to accomplish the goals of the institution for an online student services website. If a consultant is hired, the timelines may increase to allow for hiring external personnel.

Conclusion

Website planning and development is an integral part of a comprehensive and successful online program. Online students need and expect to have access to course selection as well as other support services that include online application, testing, counseling, library services, proctoring, tutoring, payment, bookstore services, technical support, and other online support services. National trends indicate that online students enroll in online courses as a result of having busy lifestyles and inflexible work schedules that prevent them from enrolling in traditional face to face courses. Thus, they seek flexibility, convenience, access to their course sites, and support services anytime and anyplace.

Institutions must adapt to students' new needs and educational demands. And, institutions that have decided to serve this new market of students, and that are offering Online Programs must be prepared to respond to their specific needs. If ignored, prospective students will look elsewhere for the education and services that they need to continue their educational goals or to maintain professional certifications in an ever changing and competitive workplace environment.

"Market Share" is therefore a consideration for Distance Education leaders across the country and globally, as more and more institutions join regional consortiums and form international partnerships. A well planned and well organized website can generate new revenue stream, and if it serves students well, can create repeat customers. A well organized website that is easy to navigate, and that links students to the services needed is likely to improve student retention and student success. The most important criterion of a well designed and well organized website is that it needs to be student centered.

Resources

American Council on Education


Author: Craig Cockburn, Website Design Guidelines For Improving Usability. www.siliconglen.com/usability

Best practice examples: http://admissions.tc.umn.edu/answers/index.html

www.minnesota.edu and www.accd.edu/sac/online
Meeting software examples: www.elluminate.com or www.horizonwimba.com


Online Advising

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Introduction

Students come to our institutions with varied levels of understanding of the educational planning required to successfully complete their educational goals. According to The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), "The primary purpose of an academic advising program is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals. Academic advising should be viewed as a continuous process of clarification and evaluation".

Many colleges employ counselors to provide the service of assisting students with their educational planning. This planning process requires career exploration as well as the identification of a major field of study. Many times personal problems surface and require a counselor's expertise. This academic support service is critical to student retention and success. Some students are undecided majors. Many of those who have decided on a major are not aware of the curriculum of courses required to complete their major and earn their degree. Academic advising will assist these students to choose the required courses to complete their degree. This service is best provided by master's level counselors, although some college campuses use bachelor degree personnel to provide this advising service to students.

This advising process is not new to students on college campuses. Therefore, it is not necessary to discuss the need for advising students to help them reach their educational goals. The need to provide advising to students has been established many decades ago. We must now continue to provide this service to all students.

"Academic advising should be available to distance learners at the same level it is for a traditional campus setting."


For online advising to meet the needs of all distant learners, the process and procedures must be innovative and
Once an online student has decided on a college major, the online advisory process can begin. The model suggested below is applicable for community college students.

**Involve All Components of the College**

Online advising requires the cooperation and collaboration from all components within the college. The college administration must collaborate with other colleges within their region to develop articulation agreements to ensure a seamless transfer from the community college to the 4 year institution.

Admissions and records must receive and evaluate the transcripts of transfer students. This process will require collaboration with the academic units within the college to ensure that all equivalent courses are recognized and labeled on the computer system. The online counselor will view this system to properly advise students.

An online degree audit system will give students a list of courses remaining to complete their educational goals, as well as, a list of all the courses completed and how they fit into the educational plan. This will allow students immediate feedback during registration and other busy times. The student can select courses during registration and get back with the counselor, at a less busy time, to discuss future course selections. Of course, the ideal situation is when students plan ahead and seek advisement early in the semester.

Assessment and testing is an important part of the advising process. First time college students and transfer students may need their skill levels assessed before proper advisement can be received for course placement.

All of the colleges' departmental degree plans must be available for the counselor's use. All departments within the college must keep up to date websites. This information will be linked to the online advisor's website. The college helpdesk is needed to provide technical support for students.

**Build a Virtual Office**

Using this advising model, the advisor will need to create a virtual office. One software program that can be used is **Eluminate**, an online, real-time, eLearning collaboration solution software. This software allows users to talk over the Internet, chat online, share whiteboards and share applications. Eluminate will provide synchronous interaction between the counselor and student. This software will allow the advisor and students to talk to each other online and share printed material on the whiteboard, such as degree plans, testing scores, and transcripts.

Other systems may use a similar integrated software package in the advising process or collect a variety of common tools such as **Yahoo** or **Microsoft Instant Messenger**. Many advisors even utilize components of a course or learning management system such as **Blackboard**, **Educator**, or **WebCT** in order to hold individual or group discussions in a

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/advising.htm

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closed environment with their students.

The advisor will need to be able to collect and integrate student information within secure databases. Often, the information may be added directly into a student information system but, particularly if you're dealing with confidential information, may need to be collected within files only available to the advisor. The advisor may need to master a common program such as Microsoft Access or tackle a specialized tracking program such as Accutrack or Who's Next?.

Provide the Advisor with a Website

As you may expect, the virtual office will need to be supported by a strong website for use in student discussions. A website will be developed to include links to:

- College Career Services
- College Transfer Center
- College Assessment Center
- Transfer plans for 4 year institutions in the area
- College AA, AS, AAS, and certificate plans
- Texas Common Course Numbering System
- Texas Core Curriculum where you can choose an institution in Texas, choose a core category, compare two institutions, or choose a specific course - [http://statecore.its.swt.edu](http://statecore.its.swt.edu)
- Online degree audit
- Live chat
- Frequently asked questions
- A calendar with available appointment times where students can meet with the counselor in the virtual office within Elluminate
- Online Advisory Resources
- Procedures for downloading software to complete the advising sessions
- Methods and options for conducting the advising sessions
This website will also need a form for students to complete to discuss their advising concerns. After checking the calendar of available appointment times, this form will allow students to include their requested time for the advising session. When completed by the student and submitted, it will be emailed to the counselor. The form will include a scheduled meeting time for the counselor and student to meet in the virtual office. The counselor will then reply with a confirmation of their meeting time and request more information for the scheduled meeting, if necessary.

Once the advising appointment has been confirmed, the counselor will be required to locate all of the students’ transcripts of courses completed. This may require more dialogues with the student via email to locate all of the materials needed to ensure a productive advising session.

Equipping the Virtual Office

Due to the expanding capacity of the typical office today, a lot of additional equipment may not be necessary to work in an online advising environment. Of course, the advisor will need the regular office setup, including a computer and a telephone (with long distance access), along with access to a printer, scanner, and fax machine (often included in one unit). Other tools may include a web camera and microphone and earphones or an ear-mounted telephone to make discussions easier.

Additional Resources

http://www.psu.edu/dus/mentol/

http://www.mymajors.com/index.jsp

http://www.psu.edu/dus/ncta/linkacad.htm#office

http://virtuallyadvising.com/qa.shtml#choosing

http://virtuallyadvising.com/

http://www.mccvicr.org/~staff/FIPSE-advising.html


http://www.edutools.info/student/categories/detail.jsp?id=6
Determining Student Readiness for Online Instruction

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Introduction

According to the findings of the Illinois Virtual Campus, “most institutions require basic technical skills as a prerequisite for enrollment; students are generally not required to demonstrate performance of these skills” (Washburn 2003). A review of community college literature seems to substantiate the Illinois findings but suggests institutional efforts to help potential students assess basic computer use skills. While anecdotal evidence suggests a correlation between student readiness for online instruction and student success, determining student readiness is lacking. The lack of valid instruments for determining student readiness does not mean solutions are not possible; programs and practices to help students understand the requirements of online education, to identify and anticipate skills in relation to their own skills in relation to promote student success in online instruction. The need at this point in the development and expansion of online instruction is in determining student readiness and in facilitating student success in an online environment.

The authors’ goal for this article is to provide a review of best practices to assist institutions in their efforts to determine student readiness. Student readiness in this article refers to multiple support services that prepare students for successful online instruction. Any institution preparing students for online instruction, resources required, and a deep look at how student readiness is determined. Student readiness: extending from the point of initial interest and extending through the skill development phase as students work through the institution preparing students embarking on an online education journey, and at the end, must encompass the final phase as students attend work. This article is limited to examining institutional efforts but if learning involves both learners and guides, at some point the drive must also be examined.

This document examines a variety of resources and presents a brief overview of current best practices that may be used in determining student readiness for online instruction.
equipping students for success in online instruction.

**Readiness Assessment Tools and Models.**

According to Howell, Williams, and Lindsay (2003) several factors are emerging that should be mentioned at this point: (1) the among distance-education media; (2) the increasing demand on higher education infrastructure means more distance educatik student demand for flexibility in program structure to accommodate their responsibilities is being supported and answered. The implications among which are a greater need for helping students determine their readiness for learning in an online environment viable instruments that help students examine their readiness for learning in such an environment.

The models included in this document indicate a strong preference for an initial interactive assessment to help students determ an online environment. The assessments generally tend to focus on two areas: (1) technical skill, and (2) on study skills and n address learning styles.

**The University of Georgia.** The University of Georgia is one of the institutions that is providing the help that students need. E Readiness Tool (SORT) developed for the University of Georgia (2001), consists of six research based interactive assessment assess their readiness for online learning. The goal is to help learners make an informed decision based on the information at the six modules. Each module consists of a brief description, an interactive questionnaire, immediate feedback, and strategies Indications are the model places responsibility on the learner to work through each of the modules and to make subsequent de garnered from the modules and additional links. SORT consists of the following modules:

1. **Technology Experience**

Since computer access and skills levels are deemed important factors on learners' attitudes toward online education, t instrument consisting of nine items helps the learner assess the level of computer, email and Internet skills.

2. **Access to Tools**

Since convenient and consistent access to hardware and software tools is vital for success in online learning, the Acc questionnaires is designed to help the learner determine access to the most common tools for online courses. Student: under consideration to determine whether additional tools are needed.

3. **Study Habits**

Because study habits and skills are critical to learning, the nine question Study Habits quiz helps students determine s area.

4. **My Lifestyle**
In order to help students examine the demands of their schedule and the requirements of the course, the six question the compatibility of their lifestyle and online learning.

5. **Goals and Purposes**

   This six item questionnaire helps students assess their motivation for learning.

6. **Learning Preference**

   The eleven item questionnaire helps students identify their preferred style for processing and remembering instruction understanding of information processing to the course selection decision and to determine strategies for a more successful learning experience.

A resource link provides specific strategies and additional links to needs identified in each of the modules.

The strengths of the SORT model include an interactive format, immediate feedback, a focus that extends beyond the obvious look at the individual's responsibility for identifying the motivation for taking online courses, and a process for suggesting specific strategies.

**The Wisconsin Virtual School.** Although the Wisconsin Virtual School provides services to secondary school students, their mention. The model emphasizes personal skills and aptitudes for taking online courses. They have identified six attributes that WVS requires for the student in line with trends in distance education. According to Howell (2003) a self-directed model in distance education is emerging. It is a model which emphasizes students' responsibility for their own learning.

**Model** is one which follows the emerging trend. It links the following six attributes to student success:

1. **Self-Motivation**

   This is defined as the ability to direct the learning environment, fulfill course requirements, and achieve individual academic goals.

2. **Independent Learning**

   The assessment helps students gauge their understanding of the online environment, how it facilitates learning at an individual level relieves the stress of feeling pressured thus promoting an enjoyable learning experience.

3. **Computer Literacy**

   While advanced computer skills are not necessary, basic knowledge of electronic mail, the Internet, and keyboarding skills is important.

4. **Time Management Skills**

   An ability to organize and plan the best time to learn is needed.
5. **Effective Written Communication Skills**

   Since communication with peers and instructors is accomplished via the use of electronic formats, the ability to communicate is important to student success.

6. **Personal Commitment**

   A strong desire to learn and attain knowledge and skills via online courses requires a strong commitment to participate.

Wisconsin Virtual School students take a Browser test to ensure that their computers have all the necessary components and The Student Orientation Tutorial available to all new students introduces students to the platform and tools that will be used in interactive assessment is available to help students determine if online instruction is right for them. This online interactive assessment includes a brief advisory, and a note about the options offered by online instruction.

The strengths of the WVS model include the emphasis on the personal student attributes that contribute to success, the interactive feedback, and the Browser test with its well organized site and instructions for downloading required software.

**Austin Community College.** The Austin Community College model is simple, clean, and interactive. The Distance Learning: Student Orientation: interactive assessments designed to assist the student making a decision regarding the appropriateness of distance learning courses. The model includes three interactive modules:

1. **DL 101: Learning Style Self-Assessment**

   This module is intended to help the student understand his/her learning style preference and to determine whether distance learning is a good fit for the student.

2. **DL 101: Technical Skills Checklist**

   This is an interactive checklist designed to help the student determine the level of technical skills and includes online training and hands-on resources.

3. **Passport to Success**

   This is an online interactive workshop that enables the student to explore the basics of distance learning. The workshop includes links to support resources.

The model is linked sequentially so the registration information page is accessible from the assessments page. The registration data is linked to course information, and access to support resources.

The strengths of the model include an excellent interactive workshop and extensive resource list.
The San Antonio College Model. One of the community colleges that offers extensive and in depth help to potential students (SAC). Their Readiness Test is a quick, interactive, nine item self-evaluation that helps students determine the appropriateness provides an immediate brief advising report. Students who have taken the Readiness Test are advised to proceed to Module 3 which prepares them to take online courses. The three modules, which require one to three hours each, prepare students for online students, and may be completed in any order. The SAC Internet Skills Center provides three instructional modules as follows:

1. **Module I: Basic Computer Skills** which addresses the following components
   - Understand basic computer operations
   - Take an overview of Windows operations
   - Create and save Word documents
   - Edit a Word document
   - Format a document
   - Set and adjust margins
   - Insert headers and footers
   - Set document margins
   - Use the Help menu
   - Print a document

2. **Module II: Web-based Library Skills** consists of the following:
   - Take a virtual tour of the library
   - Use the online catalog
• Explore library resources
• Find information on the Internet
• Enhance library research skills.

3. **Module III: Online Course Readiness Module** which is designed to teach students how to take an Online course completers of the module to do the following:

• Access the SAC Distance Education web site
• Use the Internet for SAC courses
• Use email in web courses
• Access Online course files
• Obtain technical support

The strength of the San Antonio College model includes an interactive assessment to determine Readiness for Online Education designed to assist the learner develop the requisite skills for success in an online environment, and the Internet Skills Center to students. The model also provides opportunities for faculty to develop the skills required for successful experiences in an or appropriate motivation. The faculty skill development portion is addressed in the section on **Learning Guides/ Facilitators for L**

**Cascadia Community College.** The Cascadia Community College model includes a short, interactive, twelve item assessment to determine the distance learning environment is appropriate for them. A brief advisory based upon the assessment score is provided. This model is that the assessment is offered through Washington Online, the state's virtual campus. The **Was** facilitates collaboration among Washington State colleges to provide greater educational opportunities.

The Washington Online Virtual Campus offers prospective students an opportunity to explore seven excellent informational modules to the distance learning environment. The initial topic includes the readiness assessment and the Blackboard Week Zero Tutorial intended to introduce students to the platform to be used. It is called Week Zero because it is deemed to be most effective if classes. The tutorial is set up in a Blackboard classroom similar to the one used in the college classes.

Other topics include online learning skills, advising student selection, financial aid information, information on required hardware. The excellent **Learn-To-Learn Course** module. The **Learn-To-Learn course** offers an introduction to online learning for students who are taking an online class for the first time. The course, produced by Washington Online and The Boeing Company, helps the students learn:

1. Online course navigation
2. How to use e-mail

3. How to participate in chat rooms

4. Browser functionality

5. Study Skills

Cascadia Online provides a good introductory overview for first-time online students. The page contains a short guide designed for online class environment. The overview includes six steps:

1. Is Online Learning for Me?

2. Information on the Technology and Skills Requirements for a successful experience.

3. Hints for effective schedule planning to allow regular attendance and homework time for the online course.

4. An opportunity to explore the Learn to Learn tutorial.

5. Practice navigating in Blackboard by doing the Week Zero Tutorial.

6. An opportunity to buy textbooks and activate your library card. Information on library services available online through research help availability through www.lib.washington.edu/services/qnalive is presented.

The Cascadia Model is comprehensive. The assessments, tutorials, and information pages are very helpful. One of the most interesting is the linkage with the Washington Online Virtual Campus. It is an excellent model of collaboration.

Coastal Bend College. Coastal Bend College (CBC) is one of the smaller Texas community colleges developing and delivering instruction to consumers who are not interested in the circumstances of the institution but are interested in the availability of online instruction, in services for online instruction that are offered by an institution, even smaller institutions are required to provide the requisite instruction. These expectations have profound implications for smaller institutions which must rely on limited institutional resources to deliver instruction which is capable of competing with the sophistication of models developed at larger institutions. It does, effectively demonstrate what is possible with the use of Internet technology.

Smaller institutions rely on “personal touch” and a dimension evident in a “high tech-high touch” environment. CBC’s use of Internet technology for online courses and information on the entire institution’s website, an interactive assessment is not used. Advisors work with individual students to help them determine their readiness to succeed. The advising process includes a review of attributes of successful online learners and of student’s technical skills.

The Coastal Bend College Model follows this process:
1. Students interested in taking an online course submit an Application To Take Internet Courses which requires applicants their technical skills.

2. Students meet with an Internet-specific advisor to determine their readiness and to enroll as determined by the student technical skills, life schedules, and motivation.

3. Students attend an Orientation for Internet Students which addresses the following components:
   - CampusConnect (online student information access)
   - ECOS
   - CBC Student Email Program
   - Internet Course Test Policy
   - Explore WebCT
   - How to Navigate the Web Links
   - Smarthinking (online tutoring assistance)
   - Introduction to CBC Web-based resources and HelpDesk

4. Retention Specialist directs initial contacts with online students via the HelpDesk and works with faculty to monitor clas

5. The HelpDesk assumes vital functions attempting to accomplish these via its webpage which provides links to Online support services available through the HelpDesk include:
   - Student Support which includes information on orientation dates, downloads, web page creation, and a link website.
   - Faculty Support which includes: basic faculty online tutorials, information on uploading files to ColdFusion's information on multimedia software, and WebCT.

The strength of the CBC model includes a “high touch” approach, numerous face to face orientation sessions, distribution of or and the helpdesk.

**Staffing a Program to Focus on Learners**

Since the most important person in distance education is the learner, the focus of the staffing structure must center on the nee
institution through its support services enhances the learning environment, the individual learner, and whatever internal and external operation, must assume a priority role in the learning process. Although the role of the individual learner may be obvious, the need for a proactive institutional posture in providing timely, relevant, and acceptable interventions to assist the learner in the process of readiness for learning in an online environment.

Institutions offering courses via the Internet must provide support services to help online students get started with a major emphasis on 2002. Although some offer more sophisticated services, most institutions that have developed a distance learning program provide support. All educational endeavors are systems made up of various interconnected components according to Davis (2004). In distance course development and delivery and how these systems are linked to other services and their components must be understood and quality (Davis, 2004). While the student may be the primary beneficiary in distance learning, many people contribute to this endeavor: test center personnel, librarians, and administrators work to ensure the delivery of viable online courses.

In reviewing the staffing that is required to assess student readiness, the whole range of preparation, delivery, support, and evaluation must be examined. Although the review begins with the learner as central, curriculum/course designers who develop the modules to provide instruction, internet specific advisors who assist learners in making course selections and throughout their development, the institution's staff who work to maintain a viable technological infrastructure, the student services staff from a counseling, and test center who provide support, and of course the faculty who encourage, guide, and challenge learners must be considered.

**Technicians.** The most obvious of services are those of a technical nature. The people with technical skills either develop the technical requirements site or provide the information for others to develop the site. In any case, the technicians cannot be ignored. Institutions provide technicians to assist with these issues. **Terra Community College** provides a basic listing of technical requirements of their responsibility to ensure that they have access to a computer that meets the minimum hardware and software requirements that is easily accessible to all potential students.

**Help Desk.** Help Desk staff provide ongoing support in the online environment. The following examples are selected from institutional web pages that list contact information.

One of the sites providing support services in the form of information is the Community College of Baltimore County provides a login information, AOL issues, employer firewall problems, and WebCT help are available through the links from the Online Help Desk.

The **College of DuPage Help Desk** is extensive including FAQs, contact information for counselor charged with providing online technical help for the Anion system, and email support. This page provides comprehensive information on available services. A FAQs link opens a new small window keeping the original window available.

The Cascadia Online site demonstrates a team comprehensive approach listing instructor, Help Desk, Advisor, and Distance Learning members whose responsibility is to help online students succeed. An impressive addition is **WAOL Help** which links to 24/7 telephone support, live phone support, and 24/7 Real-time eChat.

Some institutions offer online tutorials from links off the Help Desk. The Coastal Bend College Help Desk webpage is an example of online tutorials.

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/readiness.htm

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Thus, while the student may be the primary beneficiary in distance learning, many people contribute to that success. Technicians, Help Desk, faculty, test center personnel, librarians, and administrators are some of the people who work to ensure the delivery of quality services.

PROCEDURES

Advising. Online interactive assessments generally produce a short advisory which includes directions for accessing the required modules. Although the number of preparatory modules varies, these modules generally help the student develop basic technical learning style, examine their commitment to online learning, and determine the constraints on their time. There is little information about the "HOLD" process; however, some institutions use the degree audits for online registration for ensuring completion. Holds are often removed as part of the advising process. Institutions do not make distinctions between online and onsite student testing, and registration process or requirements.

San Antonio College includes a link off the distance learning page to Admission and Registration which lists the following eight steps:

1. Step 1- completion and submission of online application
2. Step 2- submission of transcripts and the removal of any “holds”
3. Step 3- information on placement requirements and test sites
4. Step 4- information on contacting an academic counselor as needed
5. Step 5- information for enrollment in student development class
6. Step 6- early registration process information
7. Step 7- information for accessing financial aid is provided
8. Step 8- provides information regarding payment of tuition and fees

A link that could prove very helpful is found on Step 4 that opens the Online Counseling Services for Distance Learning.

The Austin Community College Distance Learning Step 1- Becoming An ACC Student, plainly states: “Students enrolling in Distance Learning follow the same admissions and registration procedures as students enrolling in on-campus courses.” That means:

1. Registration Checklist available to new and returning students to help them track their status in regard to the registration process.
2. ACC New Student Admission Application - this online application is available to new students who seek admission to the
3. Residency Form must be completed by all new students to determine residency classification
4. Academic Advising required for all new students prior to registration
5. Assessment Information for New Students
6. ACC New Student Orientation which may be completed online or at any of the ACC campuses
7. Additional Information for New Students
8. ACC Departments Assisting in the Enrollment Process - Identifies all offices providing services

**Orientation.** Requirements run the gamut from specific course orientations to general orientation for online classes. In some via the web. In other cases students are required to attend a face to face session.

**TVI Community College.** TVI Community College provides an interactive **orientation for online students.** The orientation is video presentation and a text version that allows student manipulation. It consists of five modules as follows: Start Here, What Study, and Success. The success module includes student success video stories, identifies the types of academic support at Connection Center, and the career resource center. Additional links open a new window with an interactive admissions form or deemed to be one of the best orientations available completely online.

The strengths of the TVI orientation include the streaming video, an interactive format, and the links to additional, relevant, and similar a type of convenience and timely service.

**Terra Community College.** Although the **Terra Community College Distance Learning Orientation** is not wholly interactive orientation comprised of four modules. An extensive list of online tutorials is available through each of the modules.

1. Module 1- Basic Skills Technology Module

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/readiness.htm
Students review terms such as mouse, drag, open, select, file, choose, double-click, download, upload, send, etc, amount of memory, size of hard drive, and processor in the computer used for the course(s), as well as specific ty| and review commands such as save, copy, and find files and folders on floppy and hard drives.

2. Module 2- Basic Skills for Using the Web

Students who complete the course are able to understand terms related to using the Web, access a specific URL, basic search using a search engine, refine a search, and research a specific topic.

3. Module 3- Basic Communication Skills

Student who complete the module are able to review email terms, recognize the components of an email message message, open, reply to, and forward a message; send CC of message; attach and send an attachment; open and address troubleshooting

4. Module 4- Online Communication Skills

Students who complete the course are able to log on to a course WebBoard, participate in a conference; reply to \ comments; open documents posted on WebBoard conference, attach documents; participate in chat room

TECHNOLOGY

According to Hughes (2004) there are three common formats that are employed to provide both technological and academic si information center which provides institutional and program information; computing helpdesks to assist with troubleshooting tec! are frequently that support a particular program area. All three are needed to support the whole learning process. In fact, instit on the technical requirements including hardware and software. Some provide troubleshooting information for AOL subscriber support some of the features of the management software.

Technical Requirements. The Community College of Baltimore County includes a comprehensive section on technical rec their Online Classes site includes helpful information on the following:

1. Internet Access Requirements

2. Minimal Computer Hardware requirements for IBM/ Intell and Apple Macintosh machines. Students are advised to chec additional course specific software.

3. Minimal Software Requirements
   a. Operating system
b. Browser Requirements and information on supported Browsers for Windows and Macs

4. Instructions on how to check to see whether the browser is WebCT compliant

5. A Note to AOL Users includes a suggestion to use a stand alone browser and instruction on how to use the stand-alone browser:

6. Browser configuration information for WebCT users is included for configuring Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer.

Washington Online, a virtual campus of Cascadia Community College includes a very good page listing the technology requirements following eight sections:

1. PC minimum configuration

2. Macintosh Minimum configuration

3. Web Browser Requirements

4. AOL users advisory

5. Listing of plug-ins that may be required:
   a. RealPlayer
   b. Flash
   c. QuickTime

6. Information on Virus Protection including a link to a computer Virus Information Page

7. Advisory on computer and Internet access requirements

8. Skill Requirements with appropriate links to other helpful sites.
**Course Management Software.** The Community College of Baltimore County offers excellent online tutorials for specific Web Community College provides an excellent tutorial on WebCT navigation. (SCCC) The SCCC tutorial uses screens captured to site. Once the first page is reviewed, WebCT tools are subsequently used to navigate through the remainder of the tutorial.

The Week Zero Tutorial offered by Washington Online provides an excellent introduction to Blackboard.

**Support Services.** The Community College of Baltimore County information on support services is informative, comprehensiv from the Distance Learning Homepage. All support services including online tutoring services are linked off this page.
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Online Freshman Orientation

Linda Bilides, M.Ed.

North Harris Montgomery Community College District

Most students enter institutions of higher education for the purpose of attaining an academic goal. The objective of student retention is shared by administrators, faculty, and student services professionals as well as the students and their parents. Most institutions insure that a firm foundation of preparation for the incoming student will provide the understanding of the tools necessary for a college experience. Freshman orientations are designed to address those needs.

Jessica Bigger, in *Improving the Odds for Freshman Success¹*, cites the historical need for freshman orientation going as far back as 1888 when Boston College created the first freshman orientation class. The current challenge is to develop freshman orientations that students may access online to meet the needs of the distance learning student, as well any student who may require the flexibility in time and location. This is especially true of the community college setting whose students are immersed in diverse responsibilities addition to college life. These online programs must meet or exceed the standards of quality to promote retention.

There are two general classifications of freshman orientations; those that address the admission and registration processes an emphasize student success strategies after the student is enrolled. While the content may overlap between the two, the former concentrates on the processes of being admitted, assessment testing and registration, and the latter typically provides strategies for successful academically. Ideally, the inclusion of the two approaches will benefit the student throughout the college experience.

The following are four examples of best practices sites that address the steps necessary to lead the student from the prospect to the enrolled student:

**FACTS.org** (http://www.facts.org/cgi-bin/eaglec?MDASTRAN=SW-HMMNE000) is Florida's official online student advising system. School students, college students, parents, and counselors can use the services provided on this website to help plan and track progress.

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/freshman_orient.htm

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progress in Florida. FACTS.org is provided free by the Florida Department of Education to help students make informed choices in education.

Penn State has an excellent First-Year Testing, Counseling and Advising Program located at (http://www.psu.edu/ftcap/tu) and presented as online “homework” for the student to explore degree options and assess readiness for college life. Responses to (http://www.psu.edu/dus/epsonline/) are collected and utilized prior to the onsite orientation to customize the advising sessions freshman year needs of the student.

Broward Community College offers Cyber Orientation (https://www.broward.edu/cyber/index.jsp) to embark upon your college. Students can select various topics (general college information, course selection, and registration/fee payment) online in order process of registering for their classes.

The North Harris Montgomery Community College District chose to provide degree planning, admission/testing, student success, and registration information in an online course format for its New Student Orientation (http://newstudent.nhmccd.edu [visitor login/password: visitor/visitor]). Here students can choose among customized orientations for post high school, dual credit or transfer enrollment. They log in and are presented with audio/visual presentations and quizzes to ensure content comprehension. Docu- their completion is required prior to registration. This program is the recipient of the National Council on Student Development: Practice Award as well as third place winner of the Terry O'Banion Shared Journey Award.

The second genre of Freshman Orientation seeks to strengthen students’ success strategies and to ease the transition to college. Vincent Tinto (1993) outlined three stages students move through: separation, transition and incorporation. Students first go through separation stage in which they move away from their home environment. Although this can be quite traumatic for students, many are able to move to the second stage, transition. During this stage students are torn between their old environment and the new and may not feel they belong in their old environments but have yet to find their places in the new one. Finally students move into the third stage when they have achieved full membership into the social and academic communities of the institution.¹ The National Resource (http://www.sc.edu/fye/) encourages and endorses significant research on college student transitions.

San Antonio College offers an online Orientation to College course (http://www.accd.edu/sac/students/sdev/html/courses.html) purpose of “Orientation to College” is to provide information which will complement the new student’s college career by facilitating the transition to college. More specifically, the primary objective of “Orientation to College” is to reduce the new student’s uncertainty and frustration by assisting in the process of familiarization with and adjustment to San Antonio College, its staff, facilities, services, procedures, curricular offerings, and student activities. It is expected that this approach will contribute toward the student’s personal and academic success. Students’ transition may be enhanced further by the secondary objectives of Orientation which are: (1) to orient the student academically, (2) to expedite the get-acquainted process and (3) to stimulate the student to strive for continued personal growth.
Stephen F. Austin University's SFA 101, [http://www.sfasu.edu/sfa101/](http://www.sfasu.edu/sfa101/) while not an online course, provides online information wishing to enroll in its orientation course.

Ohio University won the NACADA Advising Technology Innovation Award with its AAC Study Tips Website [http://studytips.aac.ohiou.edu/](http://studytips.aac.ohiou.edu/). Various interactive study skills seminars are available online.

In addition, there are various commercial programs that address increasing student success, improving student retention, and advising effectiveness. Thomson/Wadsworth offers an online program [http://www.csfi-wadsworth.com/index.htm](http://www.csfi-wadsworth.com/index.htm) called Coll Factors Index that can be purchased via a student textbook. Beginning with a pre-test, it leads students through eight factors success. Instructors can access their students' online results and require the post-test to measure students' increased percept success skills.

The Noel-Levitz Retention Management System and its College Student Inventory [http://www.noellevitz.com/nlcom/Our+Services/Retention/Tools/Retention+Mgmt+System/Retention+Management+System+o](http://www.noellevitz.com/nlcom/Our+Services/Retention/Tools/Retention+Mgmt+System/Retention+Management+System+) also evaluates the students' academic and affective indicators that may lead to attrition. Advisors using the system say it helps respond to students' needs by revealing key student concerns and recommending specific action steps in priority order. In add resulting Summary and Planning Report helps student services offices to prioritize their services and increase their office effic

In conclusion, we've seen that the core components of orientations are consistent in programs sampled in colleges across the States. Students must understand the processes of their institution and be aware of the support resources available to them. If they must identify with their role as a student and embrace clear goals for success. The value of developing exemplary orienta programs will be reflected in increased retention: Current research on the importance of freshman year has shown that stud linked to the freshman year experience that academic and social integration is the key to student success in the freshman yea. students who become academic "high risk" can be identified and taught to be successful.²

References:


Creating an Effective Orientation for Online Students

Duane Durrett  
Weatherford College

Many students are taking distance education courses for the first time as the number of programs and course offerings continues to increase. More and more degree programs offer online courses as part of the curriculum; even entire degrees are conferred to students who never leave the virtual classroom. As institutions expand their distance education offerings are students being adequately prepared to succeed in the online environment? As evidenced by high attrition rates and poor academic performance, many of the students who have access to online courses are not prepared to succeed. A partial solution to the problem lies in an institution’s ability to develop a thorough orientation process for the online learner. The three goals an orientation should accomplish include:

1. Establishing a baseline of technical proficiency among all students who enroll in online course offerings,
2. Helping students become familiar with the online environment, and
3. Creating clear expectations regarding student performance.

Beyond designing and supporting effective online classrooms, the challenge for colleges is to offer the essential support services that students in traditional classrooms receive. An effective orientation process brings together the instructional and support services offered by an institution to create an environment that promotes student success.

As a recommendation for best practices for online orientation, four areas will be addressed:

1. **Building a web portal.** A portal website is a home page for the distance education program that organizes the information students need into a single, powerful point of reference.
2. **Identifying system requirements** that determine what technology each student must have to successfully complete online courses.
3. **Establishing computer proficiencies** so that a baseline of technical proficiency among distance education students is created.

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/online_orient.htm

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4. **Designing policies** adapted to the circumstances that arise that are specific to distance learners, thus giving students the best chance possible to succeed in a remote environment.

Colleges will differ in their approach to systems, hardware, and even distance education philosophies. Realistically, budgets will drive what each college is able to develop and offer to their students. But, regardless of the differences between institutions and the distance education programs they develop, the recommendations of this chapter are designed for creating an online student orientation to improve your students' chances for academic success.

**Building a Web Portal**

A trend in higher education has been the creation of a "one-stop shop," a physical location on campus where students can go to receive a myriad of support services. Spreading services out over multiple locations on campus means that students have to make more than one stop, often in separate buildings, to access the support services they need. As the inconvenience increases, the motivation to seek out support services decreases. Students also become more likely to procrastinate when it comes to completing essential tasks such as registration or financial aid application. The one-stop shop attempts to solve the inconvenience problem by bringing together a host of student services into one location on campus thereby minimizing the effort needed to accomplish administrative tasks. The one-stop shop also serves as a catalyst to improve intradepartamental collaboration and efficiency, with the collateral benefit often being simplified processes that are more student friendly.

Similar to the way the one-stop shop functions on a physical campus, online learners need a single place where they can go to get the information they need about distance education. The creation of a portal, or distance education home page, is an important step in creating an organized, efficient distance education program. Having a single point of reference for online learners will minimize the effort they expend looking for answers to distance education questions and facilitate the collaboration between the administrative offices serving online learners. A best practice example of a one-stop site for distance education is [http://elearn.southtexascollege.edu/eST Cv3/](http://elearn.southtexascollege.edu/eST Cv3/).

Effective distance education portals have some specific features in common. First, they need to be easy to find. Often located in a prominent position on the institution's home page, the distance education link needs to be clearly identifiable for both current and prospective students. Second, distance education portals need to be easy to navigate. Maintaining a consistent graphical interface between the home page and the distance education portal will help students feel comfortable with navigation features. Third, distance education portals need to be specific. Grouping distance education information with information relevant only to traditional students will create a portal with too much information. Four, distance education portals benefit from having a URL that is easy to remember. Students, especially students who have not visited the institution's home page, will be more likely to use the portal as a point of reference if they can easily enter the name into the address portion of their web browser.

Before an effective orientation for students taking online courses can be developed, it is important to establish the portal as a functioning piece of the overall distance education program. Successful orientation programs will often reference portal content, and students should be encouraged to check there repeatedly during the semester to stay abreast of distance education information. For example, technical proficiency exams may be required of students who want to enroll in an online course. The exam can be accessed by going to the distance education portal, clicking on a proficiency test link, and logging in using a student ID and password. Using the portal during the orientation process
will reinforce the idea that students have a single point of reference for their distance education needs and make it more likely that they will return there when questions arise.

The following is a list of practices used by institutions that demonstrate effective distance education website content:

**Online Users Guide.** The first component is referred to as an Online Users Guide. The purpose of the guide is to outline for prospective students what types of distance education courses are offered, help them understand the nature of the online learning environment, and guide them in determining if they are well-suited to take an online course. Important elements of the Online Users Guide are:

**Types of Courses.** Distance education programs usually consist of courses taught in multiple formats. For example, an institution may offer courses taught using two-way video and others taught using strictly the internet via an online course platform. This section of the guide should outline each distance education format and their differences.

**Is Distance Education Right for You?** The traditional learning environment is different from the online learning environment, and students may not be prepared or enjoy taking both types of courses. Personal factors such as learning styles and academic motivation need to be considered in conjunction with situational factors such as access to campus, the ability to attend class, and work schedule. This section of the guide should outline the important considerations students need to make when trying to decide if an online course is right for them.

**Technical Proficiencies.** Distance education courses require certain technical proficiencies in order for students to be successful. Depending on the course formats offered by the institution and the level of technical expertise required by the platform and the instructors, each institution may develop a unique set of requisite skills for distance education students. This portion of the guide should provide a checklist of skills or a formal assessment of student competencies.

**Success Tutorial.** Despite having the aptitude and technical proficiency to take online courses, students still need to make adjustments to the online course environment if they are to be successful. For example, how a student submits a homework assignment and how contact is made with classmates is often entirely different from the traditional course environment. This section of the guide should describe study tips and strategies that students have employed to be successful in distance education courses.

**Minimum System Requirements.** Before an online course can be started, a student must have a computer or access to a computer that can support the software necessary to run distance education programs. System requirements should be as specific as possible and should include elements such as processor speed, memory, and network connection speed. This section of the guide should indicate the minimum system requirements needed to effectively run distance education software and also indicate areas on the physical campus where compliant computers are accessible to distance education students.

**How to Enroll in an Online Course.** Enrollment in an online course is usually the culmination of a process that involves application, admission, testing, and counseling. This portion of the guide should help prospective distance education students (who may be continuing students or new students) navigate all of the institution’s steps leading up to and including enrollment.
How to Find Your Online Course. Enrolling in an online course and actually accessing the course content can be two separate processes. Students must be able to navigate from the distance education portal to the specific course web page. In addition, students may need an enrollment key or some other enrollment verification device. Specific instructions will be needed to detail how a student can find the appropriate course number or section number from a list of departmental offerings. This portion of the guide will instruct an enrolled distance education student when, where, and how to access course content.

Email Account. An email account or some other form of supplemental technology component should be required for distance education students. Whenever possible, supplemental components should not be provided or hosted by the institution. If such a component is a requirement, this portion of the guide should instruct students how to acquire it.

Distance Course Offerings. In order to avoid confusion and comply with a philosophy of specificity, course offerings should be made available to students via the distance education portal, but only those courses offered in a distance education format. If a link from the distance education portal references a general document such as the catalog or schedule of classes, an attempt should be made to present only the portion of the document that refers to distance education courses. In this way, there is a clear delineation between traditional courses and distance education courses, and the functions of the main college page and the distance education page remain specific.

Faculty Information. Faculty information should be made available to prospective students. Students trying to decide which section of a course to enroll in can view faculty information such as credentials, experience, and instructional philosophy.

Syllabi. By having access to syllabi, students can get a clear idea of course requirements, grading criteria, types of assignments, and assigned readings. Having clear course expectations prior to registration mitigates enrollment problems that can lead to student attrition, such as late schedule changes, unneeded credits, and incomplete grades.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). A Frequently Asked Questions area (FAQ), that is well organized, informative, and frequently updated, can be a valuable tool for students looking to overcome problems that arise with enrolling and completing distance education courses. In addition, a functional FAQ can alleviate the volume of inquiries sent to technical support professionals.

Tech Support/Webmaster Contact Information. Technical support dedicated to students who enroll in distance education should be a priority for every institution with a distance education program. Direct lines of communication with support representatives (electronic and non-electronic) should be clearly displayed and referred to during online orientations. Directions to the physical location of the technical support office and instructions for processing questions and contacting support personnel are other important elements of this section.

News and Notes. A section dedicated to announcements can be an important tool for getting breaking news out to distance education students, especially when technical problems arise. For example, unplanned but necessary maintenance to a server as the result of a virus may require that online courses be inaccessible for a period of time. Students who frequently check the distance education portal can be easily informed of breaking news using this feature, another reason why reinforcing use of the page during orientation is important.
**Student Services.** Institutions offering distance education programs need to consider what student services will be available to students who do not come to campus and whether those services are comparable to those received by traditional students. For services that do not discriminate between distance education and traditional students, links to established pages for student services offices should be available (thereby eliminating the need to update multiple sites when there is a policy change – often leading to inconsistent or outdated information). If there are not established pages for the different functions of student services, creating a consolidated page of all student services available to online students maintains the specificity of the distance education portal and can be a valuable resource for students.

**Identifying System Requirements**

Before students are allowed to access online course content, they should be made aware of, and required to acknowledge, the minimum system requirements established by the technology staff of the institution. By making system requirements a part of the orientation, students will have time to investigate the specifications of their computer and may be able to make modifications prior to the beginning of class. Students may also be able to arrange for coursework to be done at a facility on campus where computers are capable of handling course demands. If students realize they will not have access to a computer with the correct specifications, they will have time to adjust their enrollment without jeopardizing their academic performance.

The variation in computer specifications among potential distance education students at your institution is enormous. Course designers and technology professionals should weigh the benefits of flashy, dynamic content that requires a lot of bandwidth and/or processing power with the limiting effect it could have on the enrollment of students who do not have access to computers capable of meeting the technological demand. Whenever possible, online course designers should build in flexibility so that online course content can be presented in a fashion that accounts for technical capability. For example, a student with a computer that meets only the minimum system requirements may choose to load a page that displays text only, whereas a student with more advanced specifications can load the same text page with the additional benefit of graphics or pictures. Regardless of the established system requirements, it is important to clearly present them to students, to do so as early as possible in the enrollment process, and to make those requirements easily accessible to students with the help of the distance education portal. Following is a list of some important system requirement considerations:

1. Decide what versions of operating systems/browsers you support. Supported operating systems might include:
   - Windows
   - Mac OS
   - Variations of Unix (e.g., Linux)

   Supported browsers might include any of the following:
   - Mozilla
• Firefox
• Opera
• Netscape Navigator
• AOL
• Internet Explorer

If useful, decide the recommended browser for each operating system.

2. Decide minimum hardware requirements. Minimum hardware requirements might include any of the following:

• processor speed
• memory
• monitor resolution
• Internet connection speed

Supported operating system versions will indirectly dictate processor speed, memory, and monitor resolution, so you probably will not need to specify minimum requirements for them. Internet connection speed, on the other hand, could range from very slow dialup to very fast broadband. Decide if there is a minimum Internet connection speed for your online courses.

3. Decide course-specific online course requirements.

Make decisions that enable you to answer this question: In addition to the common hardware/software requirements, what hardware/software must a student have in order to take a specific online course? Make these decisions with the support of instructors of specific online courses.

Additional requirements could include any of the following:

• earlier, later, or specific versions of operating systems/browsers
• faster processor
• additional memory
- higher monitor resolution
- faster Internet connection
- additional software (e.g., Microsoft Excel 2004)
- additional peripheral hardware (e.g., graphic tablet)

4. Decide other minimum requirements such as:
   - e-mail account
   - Internet access other than at your institution

Establishing Computer Proficiencies

Students wanting to enroll in distance education courses at your institution will have a wide range of technical proficiency. Either from education or experience, some students will be able to function in the online environment without difficulty and should be allowed to work through course content without fear of inadequate technical skills being the cause of poor academic performance. Others, however, will want to pursue distance education without the requisite skills needed to be successful in that environment. Those students should be identified and a system of remediation established that will eventually lead to the attainment and demonstration of requisite skills.

Student retention and success within a distance education program depend upon the establishment of an effective means of measuring student technical abilities. For example, an orientation program may be followed by the administration of an institutionally designed test. The test would discriminate between those students who already possess requisite technology skills and those who do not and limit online access accordingly. By establishing a set of proficiency requirements and testing for them before a student can access online course content, an institution can create a baseline of competency that will ensure all students have the basic skills needed to be successful in an online environment.

Using a proficiency test also means turning away students, however. Therefore, institutions having a proficiency requirement that limits enrollment accordingly also need to have an effective way to get students the skills they need. One way for remediation to happen as quickly as possible is to include technical instruction as part of a required freshmen seminar course. Doing so would eliminate the need to pay for additional credits and would allow previously ineligible students to enroll in a distance education course(s) after a single semester.

Following is a list of some important considerations when trying to establish technical proficiency:

1. Identify common online course computer proficiency requirements.
Strive to answer the question: **What computer skills must a student have in order to take any of our online courses?** Make these decisions with the support of instructors of online courses.

Minimum computer skills could include any of the following:

- using and understanding computer-related terminology
- managing local files (i.e., files on the student's computer)
- sending and receiving email, including attachments
- browsing the web
- clearing the web browser's cache
- using search engines
- citing electronic resources

2. Identify course-specific online course computer proficiency requirements.

Make decisions that enable you to answer this question: **In addition to the common computer skills, what computer skills must a student have in order to take a specific online course?** Make these decisions with the support of instructors of specific online courses.

Additional computer skills could include any of the following:

- using specific software (e.g., Microsoft Word 2004)
- using specific hardware (e.g., graphic tablet)

3. Require evidence of student computer proficiency as a prerequisite to taking online courses.

Make decisions that enable you to answer this question: **How can we (both the institution and the student) be reasonably sure that the student is prepared to take online courses here?** Make these decisions with the support of instructors of online courses and the IT staff.

Possible evidence of student computer proficiency might include any of the following:

- passing score on a local proficiency test
- successful completion of an introductory (or more advanced) computer course
- successful completion of an online course taken at another institution

4. Publish student computer proficiency requirements.

Make available to students the information they need to determine if they have computer skills necessary for taking online courses from your institution. If you offer local proficiency test and/or labs, include date, time, and location information. Make this information available in both online and in printed form.

Designing Policies

Because the learning environment for distance education students is different than the one experienced by traditional students, a unique set of policies will emerge that need to be conveyed to online students during orientation. For example, a university may enforce a 75% attendance policy for traditional students, but only require distance education students to attend a single on-campus orientation. Or, students who have not accessed the online course content after one week of courses may be automatically dropped, whereas traditional students who do not attend during the first week will be sent a deficiency notice but will not be automatically dropped from the course. Whatever policies an institution adopts regarding distance education students, they should be organized into a handbook that is made easily accessible to students during orientation. In addition to publication, it is also important to make the policies applicable to all forms of distance education offerings. Each course may have some flexibility, yet all need to conform to a general standard that is enforceable by administration and functional for students. Some important distance education policy considerations include:

**Academic integrity.** Institutions need to have a policy for handling instances of plagiarism, cheating, or other academically dishonest occurrences. Because of the increase of plagiarism, institutions will often 1) prepare a statement regarding academic dishonesty that requires acknowledgement from a student at the beginning of each course, and 2) make special effort to define plagiarism to students during orientation or another form of seminar.

**Accessing online courses.** Delineation between prospective student, enrolled student, and enrolled student with course access needs to be made to protect the integrity of online content.

**Test taking.** Acceptable guidelines for test taking need to be established. Issues such as testing location, available proctors, safeguarding test information, and student identification should be worked out and implemented in such a way that the integrity of the course is maintained and the process is functional for students and instructors.

**Inactive students.** Some students will not make an effort to access online content in a reasonable amount of time. Institutions need to decide how they will handle inactive students while giving careful consideration to two issues, 1) should steps be taken to remove students from distance education courses, 2) is that policy different from the way traditional students are handled, 3) if so, is it fair, and 4) will those steps lead to successful outcomes and be beneficial for students?

**Orientation attendance.** Students who enroll in a distance education course should be required to attend orientation. Because of issues such as identifying technical proficiencies, navigating the distance education portal, accessing online content, reviewing academic integrity, establishing system requirements, and creating student accounts, it is recommended that a general orientation be given to all students who enroll in a distance education
course as a qualifier for continued participation. Following the general orientation, students who demonstrate technical proficiency should also be offered a course-specific orientation that covers issues such as course content, testing, communication, assignment submittal, grading, etc.

**Technical support.** Institutions need to decide what forms of technical support they will offer (e.g. telephone help, email help, walk-in help), how often those forms of support will be available, and who will staff the support. Policies regarding how students should use help should be decided upon and conveyed clearly to students using the orientation process, the online student handbook, and the distance education portal. Staff that is prepared combined, with students who have been informed how to effectively use the support, will help a distance education program achieve a high level of student satisfaction and performance.

**Attendance requirements.** Depending on the types of distance education courses offered, institutions should have an established attendance policy. These policies may differ, for example, for a two-way video course and an online course; however, if the policies are clear to instructors and staff, interventions with deficient or inactive students will be more effective.

**Example**

South Texas College, McAllen, TX  http://elearn.southtexascollege.edu/eSTCv3/
Library Services for Remote Users

Marian N. Jackson, MLS
Tyler Junior College

Introduction

Libraries and library services are hardly new concepts. Since the days of the Alexandria Library, mankind has attempted to collect, preserve, and make information more readily available. What has changed, however, is the way information is disseminated since the advent of Internet. In academic libraries, the challenge is to provide information to the user who could be as close as in the dorm on-campus or as faraway as the user halfway around the world. Users now expect their quest for information to be easy and convenient. Distance users may also not be able to differentiate between high-quality information and that of lesser quality when searching for sources. Although many institutions define their Distance Learning (DL) students as only those who are remote from the campus, most libraries include those students who are enrolled in perhaps a combination of traditional classroom instruction and in Distance Education (DE) courses. With these kinds of challenges, consideration as to the best practices for providing information must become a priority.

Procedures

In 1997, the Consortium for Educational Technology in University Systems (CETUS) summarized the challenge for those of us trying to devise strategies for meeting the library needs of distance learners in this way:

The fundamental question must be "how do we serve distance learners in ways that meet or exceed academic standards of traditional classes?" Many [accrediting agencies] encourage colleges and universities to build off-campus libraries that are modeled after the campus library environment. Yet duplication and shadow services are not the answer. As we move toward more sophisticated technological delivery of higher education, the very nature of our business will change. So, too, must the library.

The process of making library services available to the distance learner must begin with becoming very familiar with standards and guidelines created by accrediting agencies for the colleges and for libraries. Some of the major standards and guidelines to be used include:
- ALA's *ACRL's Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services*

- Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications (WCET)

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

- Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)

Once a working framework of standards and guidelines has been established, the mission of the college must be compared to the mission of the library and its web-presence. This may be an obvious comparison, but it is an important step nevertheless.

Consideration of the purpose of the library website and the target audience must be made next. For whom are you providing the resources? Who is/are your target audience(s)? Faculty? Students (both on-campus and remote)? Community users? Identify the level of library services currently available to your patrons. What internal and external factors, if any, restrict these services? How many students are enrolled in the college's DE courses and where are they located? Are there patrons with special needs? The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines are widely regarded as the international standard for Web accessibility.

Next, clearly state your library's goals and objectives for the program. Develop guidelines and operating procedures for each component of the library's program. An organizational scheme should be selected based on the audience and on the content of the website.

The library's webpage should provide DE students with all of the elements consistent with support for the traditional student. Some of the more basic components are:

1. Ability to search the library catalog for books;

2. Access to the library's databases;

3. Reference assistance by telephone and/or email;

4. Interlibrary loan and document delivery; and
5. Library contacts by department.

You may never see DE students face-to-face, so it is important to also include specific information unique to services for these students. For instance, specify if your library will mail materials to them in support of their classes and provide them with appropriate library staff contact information.

Content is the most important element of a library's website. Useful and easily accessed information is what distinguishes a great website from a mediocre one. Prioritize content selection to match the goals and needs of your audience. What resources will you link through your website? How will you organize these resources? By subject? By resource type? By type of library service?

The information should be laid out in a logical manner, with clear header information and distinctive sections. Keep the organization of the pages as simple as possible. Pages should be balanced between appealing design and important content. Place the most important links and information at the top of each page. Links should be practical, logical, and consistent. Navigational icons, if used, should be unobtrusive and their meaning obvious. Consistency within the format of related web pages is vital. Using a template will ensure consistency. Consider offering a site map and/or a table of contents. If restrictions apply to the resource (i.e., "available only on campus"), posting the restriction in an obvious area on the site is important. Include tutorials on topics such as website evaluation skills, plagiarism, word processing, literacy information skills, effective electronic reference skills, study skills, and copyright information.

Remember: If the user cannot easily locate and use the content on the website, it is as if the content does not exist!

In real estate, the mantra is Location, Location, Location! In library services, it is Content, Content, Content! Where does one get the content in developing the library's web pages? The first source when looking for content is the existing print materials produced by the library:

- Pathfinders (handouts) developed for your patrons;
- Library newsletters;
- Press releases;
- Library manuals;
- Handbooks;
- Annual reports;
- Social publications;
- Print resources;
- Community information files;
- Image collections; and
- Other library-specific resources.

In creating new content for your website, begin by examining what is new about your library:

- Have new services been added?
- Are newly developed or scheduled tutorials or workshops available?
- Have new titles or Internet resources been added?
- Are there any special or forthcoming events?
- Have any renovations or changes been made to the library?
- Are there any new recommendations or reviews of books, videos, or Internet resources?

As you add or modify the features of your site, it is imperative that users are made aware of these new features. Different users will be reached by different promotional approaches. For academic libraries, the best way to promote the use of your site is to make DE faculty aware of the site and help them integrate the library's resources into their curricula. Maintenance of library services on the website requires continuous updating of any information provided as well as continuous training and availability of library staff to respond to reference and other questions. It is crucial to regularly check links to ascertain their currency and validity as well as incorporating new resources into your website.

Here is a sample site map of those content items you want to consider when designing your website:
Site Map

Site Index and/or Table of Contents

Library Policies and Procedures
  o Library Mission Statement
  o Acceptable Use Policy
  o Circulation
  o User ID cards
  o Holds and fines
  o Lost or damaged material

Services
  o Virtual reference desk
    ■ The Virtual Reference Desk
    ■ LiveAssistance software
    ■ Florida Distance Learning Reference & Referral Center
    ■ Internet Public Library
- LiveHelper

- Egroups – Live Reference discussion


- Document Delivery
  - ClioDoc
  - OCLC ILLIAD
  - Prospero (an electronic document delivery system)
  - Document Delivery Suppliers (list maintained by Jean Shipman)
  - Focused Investigation of Document Delivery Options: FIDDO
  - Just in Time: Electronic Document Delivery Services

- Electronic Reserves
  - University of North Carolina – Greensboro
  - XanEdu CoursePacks (from ProQuest)

- Special needs population
- "Accessible Web-based Distance Education: Principles and Best Practices." by Harrison, Laurie

- Designing More Usable Web Sites

- WebAIM (Web Accessibility in Mind)

- Usable Web

- Macromedia Software

- Forms That Work

- Freedom Scientific

- GW Micro, Inc.

- W3C HTML Validation Service
  - Distance learning users
    - Central Michigan University Off-Campus Library Services
  - Student services
  - Faculty/staff services
  - Community user services
  - Open computer lab services

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/library.htm
- Media services

Pathfinders and Tutorials

- How to evaluate websites
- How to find books and articles
- How to request an Interlibrary Loan
- How to request acquisitions

- How to cite sources
  - MLA
  - APA
  - Chicago Style

- How to study

- Plagiarism and Academic integrity
  - Harvard University Misuse of Sources
  - Turnitin

- Information literacy
  - University of Texas TILT (Texas Information Literacy Tutorial)
- Austin Community College *Infogame*
- Cal Poly State University *Information Competence Tutorials*
- Western Michigan University *Labyrinth: University 101 Tutorial*
- University of Southern Georgia *GALILEO*

Online forms

- ILL request
- Acquisitions request
- Ask a Librarian
- Library Report Card or Evaluation of Library Services

Glossary of Library Terms

Library Staff Directory

- Picture of staff member
- Name and Title
- Telephone and fax numbers
- Office number
Email address

Mailing address

FAQs

Library and Computer Lab hours

Virtual tour

Floor plans

"How do I ..." questions

Special Collections

Native American Indian

Legal

Nursing and Allied Health

Texas History

Faculty Innovation Center

Links

Regional or state databases such as TexShare
Online Student Support Services

- Subscription databases
- Free databases
- Instructors' home pages
- On-campus services
  - Bookstore
  - Career Planning
  - Student Services
  - Academic Advisors
  - TRIO
  - Support Services
  - Counseling Services
  - Testing Center
  - Financial Aid
  - Others

Online Card Catalog (IPAC)

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/library.htm
Periodicals Holdings List

Archives

Library Newsletter

- Feature of the Month
- Staff of the Month
- Suggestion Box and Library responses
- New Items or services
- Special events (library exhibits, speakers, brown bag sessions, etc.)
- Tips on using/finding library resources
- Policy information

- Copyright information
  - Copyright Clearance Center
  - Copyright Crash Course – University of Texas System
  - Copyright in the Library – Fair Use: Reserve Room Operations, Electronic Copies - University of Texas
  - Center for Intellectual Property & Copyright in the Digital Environment – University of Maryland University College

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/library.htm
Additional Resources

- Project LEAD

- Baylor University Libraries web site takes a look at web site usability issues

- University of Wisconsin – Madison Libraries page concerning HTML, design, accessibility, images, HTML checkers and much more

- Great resources compiled by Ron Jantz at Rutgers University Library

- The Library Online page from St. Petersburg College Library is a good example of content to include for your DE students

- “Design Elements for Great Web Pages: Readability, Browsability, Searchability Plus Assistance” by Eric Morgan from the Virginia Library Association

- Cornell University Library Web Design Guidelines
Evaluation

In the ACRL Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services (1989), it is recommended that librarians regularly survey DL library users in order to "monitor and assess both the appropriateness of their use of services and resources and the degree to which needs are being met." Surveys are time-limited in that they only provide a snapshot of the view held by the DE students at the particular time the survey was distributed. In the quickly changing world of technology and library services, and in order to keep informed about student opinions, the survey should be revised and repeated as frequently as possible. Such surveys will assist in identifying who your DE students are and enlighten you as to their evolving concerns and needs for library services and resources.

Evaluation of a website or its resources can be done as:

- Mail-to links
- Webforms (including such features as text-entry fields, pop-up menus, checkboxes)
- Surveys
- User evaluations
- Web statistics
- Collaboration with other campus units

Some sample survey instruments can be found at the following websites:

- University of Texas – Arlington
- Regent University

Technology

We rely heavily on the technology to streamline the work, deliver the service in a more convenient, timely fashion, provide access to the library catalog and databases, and enhance the quality of all course instruction, including library instruction" (Block, 45-59).

One of the first questions to ask is “Does your site have an appropriate level of Internet connectivity to run your website?” In other words, “Is your engine big enough to push your car?”

To make the most effective use of technology, start by assessing your current capacity and then plan on how to improve it. Outline a timeline and action plan your library can edit and refine as you create and update your technology plan.

- Your technology plan is driven by your mission statement and your vision for how computer technology can improve service to library patrons. Assemble a technology planning team and create mission and vision statements to drive your planning processes.

- Your technology plan will naturally derive from an inventory of your current resources. Once you have an accurate picture of your hardware, software, and network connections, you’ll be better able to plan for the future.

- Beyond computer equipment itself, you also need to understand how computer technology is used in your library. Gather information on how you are currently implementing security, developing staff skills, and using software tools to implement a communications strategy.

- Once your library technology plan begins to take shape, provide recommendations on specific tasks to be undertaken towards achieving your technology vision. Break down those recommendations into manageable steps and track cost and effort required for each one, as well as staff assignments and schedules.

Douglas Lord’s Connecticut State Library Checklist for Technology Plans (2004) is a checklist to help you walk through your library’s technology planning process.

Providing access to restricted online resources is one of the most difficult endeavors for librarians. Library subscription databases are restricted due to licensing agreements, so students searching from off-campus must be authenticated to gain access. Most accomplish this through the use of proxy servers or software that communicates with the library’s automation system.

Some library automation vendors make authentication software programs available as part of their systems. One such program, Remote Patron Authentication (RPA) by Horizon (a Dynix, Inc. product), allows the library to place a link from their web site to an authenticating page. After entering their user ID, a student may access all resources listed on the following pages. RPA authenticates by searching student records that are loaded into the system each semester.
Other libraries may choose to authenticate their users through a proxy server. A proxy server is the “interceptor” between requests made from a web browser and the intended URL. It then validates users, allowing them access to licensed databases that require authentication. Since the proxy server is able to store searches for a period of time, it improves the efficiency of searching. Proxy servers do not work with all service providers or web browsers, and some database vendors do not allow their use.

**Authentication Resources:**

- An extensive list about user authentication from Steve Hunt at Santa Monica College Library.

- List of good information about proxy servers and remote access from the Colorado State University Library.

- Useful Utilities provides excellent resources about EZproxy

**People**

Obviously all the technology and procedures in the world can be at your disposal, but without the appropriate personnel to plan, implement, and evaluate DE library services, those electronic library portals will not open.

Who should be included in the development and management of DE library services? In *Providing Library Services for Distance Education Students* [Goodson, 2001] the following is suggested:

1. A librarian-administrator to plan, implement, coordinate, and evaluate library resources and services addressing the information and skill needs of the DL community;

2. Professional and/or support personnel (possibly from Media Services and/or from DE departments) on-site with the capacity and training to identify information and skill needs of DL library users and respond to them directly;

3. DL community representatives, including administrators, faculty, and students to formulate objectives and to regularly evaluate the DL library services program;

4. IT personnel to provide the necessary support of automation for the DL program (including webmaster, Help Desk, et al.);

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/library.htm 9/28/2005
5. An instructional designer to participate in the curriculum development process and in course planning for distance learning to ensure that appropriate library resources and services are available; and

6. DL library users to monitor and assess the appropriateness of their use of services and resources and the degree to which needs are being met and skills acquired.

There are many things to consider when planning a DE library services including additional cost, additional staff and training, and ongoing technical support. The specific type of support that you are able to provide depends on the circumstances of your particular library. Does your staff possess the capabilities to manage each of these services? Will each department be responsible for their area of support or will you designate one person to coordinate all library support services? Does your library staff have the technical expertise to maintain a web page and additional online resources? Everyday responsibilities can be taxing to your library staff, so consider the additional burden it will place on your staff when outlining the services you will provide.

**Now What?**

Once your library website is ready, talk it up!

- Work with your campus’s instructional designer to get the library component incorporated into DL courses when the course is first developed.

- Identify faculty members who will embrace this form of library support for their students. Take the mountain to Mohammed. Go to their offices and/or classrooms to demonstrate using the library’s website.

- Meet with the different departments on campus to demonstrate the relevancy of such resources to the user.

- Schedule brown bag sessions, faculty development workshops, and individual one-on-one sessions to demonstrate the website.

- Be visible at all open meetings on campus (faculty senate, departmental meetings, enrichment series, student senate meetings, etc.)

- Visit off-campus sites to make contact with faculty and students.

- Consider communicating with students via chat rooms, bulletin boards, and Blogs.
• When students submit forms or requests via your website, make sure there is a confirmation screen to verify that the request was received. Ensure the clarity of hours as well as response time.

• Send emails to faculty, staff, and students (if you can send a group email) whenever there is an addition or change to the library website.

• Be PROACTIVE!

Resources and Additional Reading


**Project LEAD: Librarians Entering A New Dimension.** Summer Workshop for Distance Learning Librarians. (2002, July 22-26). (Sponsored by Project LEAD, a two-year grant written by The University Center and Montgomery College, North Harris Montgomery Community College District, The Woodlands, Texas, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.


Tyler Junior College website: [http://www.tjc.edu/library/index.htm](http://www.tjc.edu/library/index.htm)
Building an Online Student Newspaper

Lance Zimmerman
Texas State Technical College - Waco

Introduction

Most colleges have a student newspaper. The exact composition and nature will vary greatly from college to college. Larger colleges will be more inclined to be larger in scope, multiple pages with photographs and advertising produced by students in a journalism department while smaller colleges may produce something more in the nature of a newsletter outlining upcoming campus events.

There are a lesser number of colleges whose student newspaper is online. Our purpose is to give consideration as to what are the best practices in converting a traditional student newspaper to an online format or creating an online student newspaper from scratch.

Procedures

The first thing one should do when converting or creating an online student newspaper is to compare the mission of the online newspaper to the mission of the college. If converting a traditional newspaper to an online format a comparison may have already been done. Be that as it may, the mission of the online newspaper should be examined and compared to the mission of the college. In most likelihood there wouldn't be a change in mission by creating an online newspaper, but this examination should take place; especially if the online version is replacing the traditional version.

If creating a new mission statement for the online newspaper, its purpose should be examined. Is the purpose to report news or to provide a schedule of activities and services; to promote the college or to give journalism students real-time experience?

Consideration should also be given to the newspaper's target audience. Is it just for online students or for traditional students as well? Is the community part of the target audience or are prospective students? Are faculty and staff part of the audience? Answers to these questions are important because the answers will influence marketing, content, and other decisions that need to be made.

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/news.htm

9/28/2005
How to Convert a Traditional Newspaper to an Online publication

1. Examine the website that will be hosting the newspaper.

To avoid costly errors in converting to an online format, the appropriate personnel of those hosting the newspaper should be consulted early on in the process. Their expertise will be a valuable source of information. The particular technology they use may help in selecting the technology used for the conversion. This is true of an in-house site or outsource hosted site.

2. Examine the current technology being used to create the newspaper in the traditional format.

The technology used to create the paper in its present format may also be used for the online format. If a page layout program such as PageMaker, QuarkExpress, etc. is being used, then conversion may be simplified. Most page layout programs have the capability of creating HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) files, the type of files used in creating web pages.

Even if a page layout program is not being used capable of creating HTML files, the stories may be being written using word processing software that can convert to HTML or be imported into a page layout program. As mentioned before, the personnel hosting the newspaper will be able to help in this regard.

3. Select technology based upon finding of 1 and 2.

Examining the technology used to create the traditional newspaper should lead to a simple selection of the technology to use to create the online newspaper. If this is not the case, there is another solution. The traditional newspaper can be scanned and the resultant file can be converted to a PDF (Portable Document Format) file. This technique is not limited to scanning a traditional newspaper but may also be used in conjunction with a page layout program.

4. Some things to consider when converting your newspaper to an online format; they also apply in creating an online newspaper from scratch.

   In-house vs. outsourcing--Consider whether to outsource the publishing of your online newspaper as opposed to publishing it in-house. Outsourcing the publication may be a viable option, especially to the smaller college who may not have a journalism department or the technical skills for putting a publication online.

   When publishing any web content, consideration should be give to the various web browsers that may be used to view the content. Internet Explorer and Netscape are the two most widely used, but there are others growing in popularity including Mozilla, Foxfire, etc.

   Accessibility Issues--Most colleges are required to adhere to section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 1998 to include electronic information technology. The final product whether converted from a
traditional format or created from scratch should meet the 508 standards.

Procedures for Creating a Student Newspaper in an Online Format

1. Determine the appropriate department or individual(s) to implement the online format.

In many instances a college journalism department is responsible for the student newspaper whether traditional or online. When a journalism department does not exist or there is not even a journalism class, the Marketing/Public Relations department may assume responsibility for the newspaper. If there is no Marketing department then a journalism professor or other professor with some journalistic background may be available.

2. Examine other college's online newspaper to get an idea of what is desired.

Sometimes the people involved in implementing an online student newspaper will have a vision of what they want and expect. In those instances where there is not a vision (and even if there is) surfing the Internet and looking at other online student newspapers will help in defining that vision. Not only may you find what you like, but also you may find what you want don't like.

3. Inventory available resources including personnel and technology.

This is an important step in that it will provide the information needed to decide whether or not to outsource the production of the paper. When taking inventory of available personnel, be sure to include each person's technical skill set. What software are they conversant with and to what level. When taking inventory of software, look for page layout programs, web development packages, and photo editing software. The hardware inventory should include which software will run on each machine. Be sure to look for a machine capable of serving as a web server.

4. Decide whether to go in-house or outsource.

At this point enough information should have been collected to be able to decide whether to publish the paper in-house or to outsource the publishing. The two driving factors in this decision will probably be available skill sets and cost. Does the person with the journalism skills also have the computer skills necessary to publish an online newspaper? If they don't, do they have access to people with those skills? If the answer to both of those questions is no, then outsourcing the publication may be the best way to go.

Even if the publication is outsourced, there will be some elements that will be done in-house. Student reporters will write the stories, take the photographs, sell any advertising, etc.

5. If appropriate technology is not available, purchase the technology

If access to the appropriate technology is not available on campus it must be purchased. A good starting point is the inventory of available skill sets. When buying technology the proper sequence is to select the appropriate
software and then purchase the hardware required to run it. Help may be available from your campus IT (Information Technology) department.

6. Provide training for the appropriate personnel.

Depending upon the skill set of available personnel, training may be required. Even if there are personnel available skilled in the software to be used, it may be desirable to provide them further training. The more skilled the person is, the faster and easier will be the publishing process. Training may come in the traditional, in class format or perhaps can be accomplished using computer-based training material.

7. Considerations.

Some of the things that should be taken into consideration when publishing an online newspaper from scratch are the same as in converting from a traditional format and therefore are repeated here.

When publishing any web content, consideration should be given to the various web browsers that may be used to view the content. Internet Explorer and Netscape are the two most widely used, but there are others growing in popularity including Mozilla, Foxfire, etc.

Accessibility Issues—Most colleges are required to adhere to section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 1998 to include electronic information technology. The final product whether converted from a traditional format or created from scratch should meet the 508 standards.

Where will the online newspaper reside? Will it be on a server already in operation on campus or will it need its own server?

Software

Three software categories are involved in publishing an online newspaper. The categories include: 1) word processing/page layout software, 2) web design/development software, and 3) web server software.

**Word processing\ Page layout\ Photo editing\ scanning, etc.** At the minimum some type of word processing and photo editing software will be needed. Even if outsourcing the publication, the news stories will have to be written and photos scanned into a digital format if using traditional photographic equipment.

Even if publishing in-house using a page layout program, most people still use word processing to write the stories and then import the file into the page layout program. Microsoft Word or one of its variants is the most prolific word processing software available followed by Corel's WordPerfect. There are others, but both Word and WordPerfect will produce files most easily read by most page layout programs and by service bureaus. Both are able to save files in HTML (hypertext markup language) which would eliminate the need for a page layout program although it is highly recommended to use a layout program as they make creating a newspaper
much easier.

Page layout programs are used to create publishable materials whether online or in a traditional format. They are more commonly known as desk top publishing programs. They help you to format your publication to appear as a newspaper with columns that flow as you would see in a newspaper, create headlines and sub headlines, create side bars, wrap text around photographs, assign captions to photos, lead and kern text, and the other functions needed to create a professional looking newspaper.

Some type of photo editing software will be needed. Even if using a digital camera, the pictures will need to be edited to a degree, if nothing else just to remove red eye or to crop to fit the page. If using a non-digital camera, the photo will have to be printed and scanned, a function most photo editing software packages support.

PhotoShop by Adobe is the most prevalent package on the market and arguably the most powerful. As with most powerful software, there is a large learning curve with PhotoShop. There are many other photo editing software packages on the market that are cheaper than PhotoShop and do not have the high learning curve. Some to consider are: FotoFinish, Ulead's Photo Impact, Picture It! Photo Premium 10 by MicroSoft, and PhotoShop’s little brother PhotoShop Elements.

According to Adobe, PDF (Portable Document Format) is a file format created “to streamline document exchange, increase productivity, and reduce reliance on paper.” PDF files look exactly like original documents and preserve the fonts, images, graphics, and layout of any source file. A PDF file can be created by scanning a paper document and converting it to a PDF format, or by converting a file from another application. A special note should be mentioned about PDF files. They will appear just as the original, but to be viewed on a webpage, a plug in for the browser called Adobe Acrobat Reader will have to be downloaded free from Adobe’s website. Adobe Acrobat Writer creates PDF files, but it is commercial and not free. Writer works similarly to a printer driver allowing the user to create PDF files from any application.

**Web Design and Development.** Most page layout or desktop publishing programs have features that convert their output to an HTML format. Even so, it may be desirable to use a web design software package. Some of the most popular are MicroSoft FrontPage, DreamWeaver by Macromedia, Namo Web Editor and Adobe Creative Suite 2. One of these would be more likely to be needed if publishing a website as opposed to creating a page or pages to go on an existing website.

**Web Server software.** In all likelihood the paper will be hosted on a web server already in place on campus. If not, one will need to be set up, but it is recommended that the college’s information technology department do it. Setting up a web server is a complicated process with many factors to take into consideration. It will have to be integrated into the campus network and there are firewall issues to consider, all usually under the domain of the campus IT department.

**Hardware**

**Computers.** Computers will be needed to run the software mentioned above. How many will be needed will depend
upon the scope and size of the particular publication. A small publication with a small staff may get by with one computer to run all the software. A large publication with a large staff will need many more. Most colleges will have particular standards set by committee or by the college's IT department. If not software specifications should be met at a minimum.

**Scanners.** There are many relatively cheap scanners on the market. Epson, Canon, and Microtek are some of the more common brands that come to mind. The main recommendation is to select a flat bed scanner as opposed to a sheet fed. A feature that would be a nice addition would be the capability to scan slides and film as well as documents.

**Digital Cameras.** There is a wide range of digital cameras available on the market. Photography departments of most commercial and college newspapers strive to have the best equipment they can afford. The price of digital single lens reflex cameras have fallen to the point they should be affordable to most college newspaper departments. Some of the more popular brands are the Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT, Pentax istDS, Olympus Evolt E300, and Nikon D70s.

**People**

Even though most of the work on an online newspaper will be done by students, a faculty/staff person will be responsible and in charge. This will be a journalism faculty person on those campuses having a journalism department or class. If journalism is not taught then someone else will have to step forward. Possibilities could come from the marketing department, student services, or a faculty member interested in an online newspaper.

Again, depending upon the scope of the publication numerous student positions would be needed and available. A journalism course would be a typical recruiting ground. If there is not a journalism class students will have to be recruited across campus. This could be a reason for limiting the scope and size of the publication.

A **student editor** will be needed to oversee all of the operations of publishing the online newspaper. This person will supervise the other students on the newspaper staff. In addition student editors may be needed for each of the departments, one over reporters, photographers, etc. If the scope of the publication is large enough, an assistant editor may also be needed.

**Student reporters** will be needed to collect the news and write the stories. Student reporters may specialize in certain areas such as sports, campus activities, college news, etc.

**Student photographers** will be needed to take pictures for the newspaper. They will have to be coordinated with the student reporters as needed by an editor. If the scope is large enough student photographers may specialize in a certain area like sports, but most often this is not the case.

**Graphics artists** will be needed especially of the newspaper is selling advertising. Some ad copy will arrive "camera ready", but most will have to be created by the graphic artist. This person will also have the skill to help with the general layout and formation of the newspaper.

A **business manager** will be needed if the newspaper sells advertising. This person will be in charge of the student
sales staff and may also make sales call.

**Student sales staff** will be needed to sell advertising. In a small scope newspaper this person may also function as the business manager.

**Considerations.** Selecting the right mix of people to work on the paper is probably one of the more important decisions to be made. Finding the skill sets or people who can learn the skill sets is important. This is easier done if a college has a journalism department or course but is not absolutely necessary.

It should be remembered that unless their newspaper job is an assignment from class, we are talking about volunteer labor. Using volunteer labor can be problematic at times.

Another consideration and source of student workers may be the yearbook staff. At many colleges students working on the yearbook sometimes work on the student newspaper. This is not always the case but it does happen.

**Conclusion**

Creating a student newspaper is no small undertaking whether it is published online or traditionally. It can be something very small like a newsletter or a publication with multiple pages, photographs, advertising or anything in between. This Monograph has tried to cover the wide range of available scenarios one might encounter, but there are too many variables to cover every conceivable event. We have tried to cover the most common.

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**Checklist for Converting a Traditional Student Newspaper to an Online Format**

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☐ The mission of the student newspaper supports the mission of the college.

☐ The purpose of the student newspaper is well defined.

☐ The target audience has been considered.

☐ Students

☐ Faculty/Staff

☐ Community

☐ Those hosting the web site have been consulted.

☐ The current technology being used has been examined for possible use.

☐ Word Processing Software

☐ Page Layout Programs

☐ Photo Editing Software

☐ Digital or Traditional Cameras

☐ Scanners

☐ New technology to be selected (if needed).

☐ Word Processing Software

☐ Page Layout Programs

☐ Photo Editing Software
☐ Digital or Traditional Cameras

☐ Scanners

☐ Outsourcing has been considered.

☐ Accessibility issues have or will be addressed.

☐ The online format has been tested for compatibility of various browsers.
[Box] The mission of the student newspaper supports the mission of the college.

[Box] The purpose of the student newspaper is well defined.

[Box] The target audience has been considered.

[Box] The appropriate department to implement the online student newspaper has been determined.

[Box] Student online newspapers at other colleges have been examined

[Box] An inventory of available resources has been taken.

[Box] Personnel Skill Sets:

[Box] journalism Skills

[Box] Writing Skills

[Box] Graphic Skills

[Box] Digital Cameras

[Box] A decision has been made to outsource or not to outsource.

[Box] If the appropriate technology has been purchased if not readily available.

[Box] Training has been provided for personnel (if needed).

[Box] Accessibility issues have been addressed

[Box] Various browsers have been tested for optimum viewing.

[Box] A decision has been made as to where the newspaper will reside.
The campus IT department has been consulted.

**Best Practices**

Kilgore College's PDF format, *The Flare*, a part of the Journalism program, [http://www.kcflare.com](http://www.kcflare.com)

North Lake College's, online format, *News Register Online*, a part of the Journalism program, [http://www.northlakecollege.edu/newsregister/index.html](http://www.northlakecollege.edu/newsregister/index.html)
Online Testing

Paul Goertemiller
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Students enroll in Distance educations courses for a variety of reasons: Some family responsibilities, employment, gas prices, students living in rural areas, students in the military, or social anxiety disorder. With technology becoming easier to use and more affordable, students may choose to purchase the necessary technology and take advantage on courses taught online.

Most distance education students can access college or university student services programs by never having to visit the campus, except perhaps, when it comes time to test. Because of test security and such issue as plagiarism and cheating, testing may have to be administered in a proctored environment; either on or off campus.

Debates continue regarding different points of view on how to test the distance ed. student; choose to have your online students test at their free will at home OR test using proctors. Until several years ago, few instructors mailed tests to students and proctors outside the classroom. The rapid growing popularity of taking a course online develops an issue with faculty: a responsibility and need to assess the online student without visiting a classroom or an instructor’s office. Testing centers and distance education departments have adopted this responsibility.

With courses taught from a distance, issues may arise in the areas of cheating and plagiarism. Carolyn Jarmon describes:

> Student success measures should be tightly tied to the objectives and designed to collect the data identified as valuable in making an overall course evaluation. In the classroom situation, instructors frequently rely heavily on paper-and-pencil test (quizzes, midterms, and exams). At a distance, such test present special challenges apart from the content of the tests. (p.57)

Methods of achievement and retention such as testing, assessment, and essay writing in a proctored environment may be a way to keep our students honest and their integrity in tack.

One of the concerns is knowing that the person submitting the test is actually the person taking the test (Jarmon, C., 1999) If students live close to campus, instructors may elect the student to take tests on campus one or more times throughout the semester. For students who live far from campus, it is possible to administer a test in a proctored environment.
environment. Later in this chapter, the people, policies and technology needed to do so will be discussed in detail.

Some philosophies state that a student enrolled in a true distance education course should be able to complete all work, including tests, from their home. Individuals argue that it is possible to evaluate a student's work by how the communicate with the instructor.

In this case it is possible to test in a way to prevent or curtail cheating and plagiarism.

**People**

Collaboration of those involved is vital when testing online students. Issues may arise if communication does not occur between the student, instructor, and testing center. Misplaced tests, incorrect passwords, incorrect dates (tests are not available), and not having proper identification are just a few mentioned problems that can occur.

The student begins the process by enrolling in the online class. They must collaborate with their instructor to determine testing arrangements such as:

- is the test administered on paper or using a computer?
- is the test administered in a proctored or unproctored environment?

If the instructor requires the student to test in a proctored environment, the instructors should collaborate with the testing staff to set testing dates, deadlines and make sure test security will not be breached. Questions the testing staff should ask of an instructor are:

- What is the course name and number?
- Is the test administered on paper or computer?
- What are the testing deadlines?
- What are the specific instructions? (use of calculators, notes, books, etc.)

Here is an example of an "Exam Receipt Checksheet" to be filled out by the instructor and used to inventory tests by the testing center staff.

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**EXAM CHECKSHEET**

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http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/testing.htm

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To be completed and sent to Testing Center for all tests given in Testing Center

1. Instructor’s Name: 

2. Course Name: 

3. Course Number: 

4. Mode of Testing: 
   - Question Mark Perception
   - Respondus
   - WebCT
   - Blackboard
   - SAMS - Windows, Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access
   - Paper

5. Begin date of test: 

6. End date of test: ______ (Is this a firm date?)

7. Exam #: 

8. May computerized exams be given by paper back-ups if unable to access computer exams.
   Yes___ No___

9. May any of the following aids be used:
   - Scantrons – 882 886 Envelope
   - Calculator _____, type allowed (simple or scientific)
   - Scratch paper
   - Dictionary
   - Notes
   - Books
   - Write in test booklets

10. Special instructions for proctors: 

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http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/testing.htm

9/28/2005
The testing center staff should then secure the passwords and if paper tests are used, lock them in a filing cabinet. Those employed in the testing center should be the only individuals with access to passwords and tests.

The last collaborative partnership will involve the student and the testing center. Online students need to be aware of the testing center hours and policies and procedures. If the student is taking the test at a location outside to the campus, they will have to establish a relationship with a proctor who is able to administer testing in a secure environment. Libraries, high school, or local higher education institutions are good examples of appropriate proctored settings. A “proctoring agreement form” is a good way to access all information needed by the student, instructor, testing center staff where the student is enrolled and the off-site proctor.
Distance Learning Test Proctoring Agreement

Student should complete this section:

Course ________________________  Instructor ________________________

Student ________________________  Daytime Phone ________________________

Student ID # ________________________  Fax Number ________________________

Testing Proctor should complete this section:

A student may be proctored through an exam by college or commercial testing center personnel, a librarian from a college or local public library, or staff from the personnel or training department in your company. Proctors should not have a conflict of interest, i.e. be a close personal friend, relative, supervised employee, etc.

Proctor ________________________  Daytime Phone ________________________

Title ________________________  Fax Number ________________________

Organization ________________________
Proctor Agreement Statement

As an exam proctor, I will proctor the agreed upon test for this Tyler Junior College student. Following contact from the instructor, I will carefully review all test instructions and certify that each test be administered in accordance with the guidelines given. Dates, times, and conditions for administering the exam will be coordinated in advance with the instructor.

I agree that all tests will remain confidential until administered to the student. Upon completion, the exam will be sent by fax or certified mail to the Testing Center at Tyler Junior College. I will file a copy of the exam until the end of the college semester.

Proctor Signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Procedures

There are several methods to administer a test to an online student. For example, testing in a proctored testing center either on a computer or a paper test, testing at an unproctored environment, or testing in a proctored setting outside your home campus.

Let's first take the online student testing at their home campus in a proctored setting.

- The instructor will list the tests and dates on the student's syllabus and inform the student if the test is administered on the paper and pencil format or a computer based format (cbl).

- The instructor will inform the testing center staff of the following:

http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/testing.htm
Online Student Support Services

- testing deadlines
- number of students enrolled in each course
- how the test is administered – paper or by computer
- any necessary passwords
- any special instructions (use of calculator, books, notes, etc.)

- The student visits the testing center during the testing timeframe. They present their ID (preferable college student ID or driver's license) to a testing center staff. The student informs the staff what test they would like to take. Purses, backpacks, cell phones, etc. are locked in a locker outside the testing facility.

- If the test is on paper, the tc staff writes the students name on the scantron or the test itself along with the instructor and test number. The scantron and/or test are stamped with the time and date.

- The student tests in a proctored, quiet environment.

- When finished, the student hands the test to a staff member. They place the test in a secured filing cabinet.

- If the student is taking the test offered on computer, the student or the proctor log the student information into the computer. The proctor then uses the secure password to gain access to the test. When the student has completed the test, two copies are printed of the results page. One is for the student and the second copy is filed in the testing center.

- Depending on what testing software is used, the instructor may be able to view the results online.

With busy student schedules, the "testing center" will have to be conscience of their testing hours. Evening and weekend hours may have to be put in place to meet the needs of the online student. From research conducted by view 25 two year institution testing center websites, 22 were open at least one evening until 7:00 p.m. and 15 had Saturday hours of operation.

Another way to administer tests to online students is to test in an unproctored environment. The instructor may elect to have the student test at home using and internet based browser. The student simply logs on to the internet, enters necessary passwords and begins to test. The instructor will receive the grade via the internet.

A third testing option is for the student to test in a proctored environment outside of the home school. With this option, collaboration and communication are vital.

- Student gets permission from the instructor to test at a site other than the home college (where the student is enrolled).
• Student finds a qualified proctor in the area where they want to test (outside the home college)

• Student fills out the appropriate paperwork (proctor agreement form) from the home college and has all individuals involved (student, instructor, tc staff, and proctor) sign the form. This can all be completed using a fax machine.

• The home college contacts the outside proctor to verify phone/fax numbers, mailing and e-mail addresses.

• The test is sent by the instructor to the testing center. The testing center staff faxes, mails, or e-mails the test to the approved proctor.

• The testing center staff communicate with the by the outside proctor when the test is received.

• The student contacts the outside proctor to set a date and time to test.

• When the student arrives to test, the proctor checks the student's identification and proctoring fees are collected if applicable.

• Student completes the test and turns it in to the proctor who files the test in a secure location

• The proctor photocopies the test and answer document and mails the original to the home testing center. (For certain budgetary constraints, photocopying and mailing may not be possible. Other methods of transmitting tests will have to be used).

• The home testing center receives the test, logs the test into a database or notebook and notifies the instructor.

**Technology**

Technology is yet a large portion to a successful administration of an online test. There are many kinds of testing software available. These software packages offer consistent test development and feature automatic grading. WebCT, QuestionMark Perception, Respondus, and Blackboard are just a few examples of testing software.

What is needed in the office and/or at home for the student?
- Testing Software
- Computer (hardware)
- Phone
- Fax machine
- Scranton reader
- Paper shredder
- Internet service
- Scanner

Resources

http://dl.tccd.net/index.php/welcome

http://www.epcc.edu/testingservices/

http://www.bucks.edu/distance/testing.htm

http://academic.yorktech.com/department/assess/makeup.htm

http://www.umuc.edu/gen/virtuniv.html

http://www.tnstate.edu/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=944

References

Online Career Services

Bryan Baker
Tyler Junior College

Introduction

What are the fundamentals for building a career services website? First, you will want a site that will work for both your online and traditional students. Second, the services you provide will be influenced by your institution's mission statement as well as the population that you plan to serve. Finally, the actual services that you offer will form the framework of your website.

In this chapter our discussion regarding the services offered will be divided into two categories - career counseling and career planning. Career counseling implies a relationship that deals with the deeper issues underlying career choice. Career counseling might include an investigation of a student's life and career goals, perhaps including a discussion of career assessment results. A student and counselor might explore the issues regarding educational requirements for various careers and the student's ability to overcome the related hurdles. Career planning is more specific, involving the activities that occur after assessments, research and education have taken place. Focusing on the process of actually seeking a position, career planning involves resume development and review, searching employment resources, networking and other issues that are related to securing employment.

Building Guidelines

The first step in developing an online career services center is to identify your guidelines relating to such activities. One of the first places to look is the National Career Development Association (NCDA) at http://www.ncda.org/index.html. The NCDA has helped to develop guidelines for offering career planning and career counseling services online. Their site offers a wealth of information, including Internet resources for career planning, guidelines on use of the Internet in career counseling, as well as electronic forums to discuss issues related to career services and vocational counseling. A review of their information is a good first step in planning your own website.

Basic Skills for the Career Services Professional

The basic skills and knowledge specific to counseling and guidance will not change in the online arena, including the main fundamental that we must be able to form a helping relationship with the clients/students. This is accomplished through good facilitator skills and the building of a relationship that is founded on trust. Ethical standards must be
maintained as outlined by the NCDA as well as the American Counseling Association (ACA).

It is also important to understand that a career counseling professional should have specific skills and knowledge that a general counselor may not possess. The specific skills and competencies outlined by the National Career Development Association serve as guidelines for career professionals and help the general counselor develop the skills to serve in the role of a career professional. It should be understood that these competencies are intended to set the minimum standards for those training for careers as Career Counseling Professionals at or above the Master's degree level of education. For others it should serve as guidelines for continued training.

There are eleven areas that the NCDA has recognized as necessary skill areas for those working in the area of Career Counseling. They are: Career Development Theory, Individual and Group Counseling Skills, Individual/Group Assessment, Information/Resources, Program Promotion/Management and Implementation, Consultation/Coaching and Performance Improvement, Diverse Populations, Supervision, Ethical/Legal Issues, Research/Evaluation, and Technology. Out of these eleven areas the NCDA has recognized Program Promotion/Management, Consulting/Coaching and Performance Improvement, Supervision, Research/Evaluation, and Technology as skill sets that must be met in order to be recognized as a member at the Master Career Counselor level.

In summary a career service professional must be very knowledgeable of the decision-making process, career development theory and other supportive counseling theories as well as program development, implementation and evaluation. The person given charge of developing a career services website should be thoroughly trained in the field of career counseling and vocational guidance. In addition they will need to be computer literate and somewhat technosavvy.

What skills and knowledge must a career services professional possess to work in the online environment? Gaining a student's trust using Internet resources will require a new set of skills that some career counseling/career services professionals are not as familiar with. In order to use the Internet as a career services tool, career services counselors and other professionals must be familiar with and comfortable using technology.

**Career Services Recipient**

In developing a Career Services website there are some items that need to be taken into consideration. One is the population that you hope to serve. Second is the mission statement of the organization or college. Both of these will influence the services that you will offer online. The population and mission statement are interrelated and will influence the services that clients are searching your website for. One of the fundamentals to offering services online are you must be committed to helping and serving people. This involves an understanding that people learn differently and choose different types of media to receive the services that we make available in our offices.

In the past, many Career Center offices were called Career Planning and Placement Services. Such centers often times focused only on the career development component leaving clients with career counseling issues little or no help. Some Career Services websites focus their process only on career planning while others focus primarily on career counseling. In order to have a full-service career center the website should contain elements of both.
The college student of today is very different from those of the past. Many have a fast paced and busy life style. Some are the sole parent in a single parent family. Others are returning adult students that are retraining for a better job and income or to find a new career after suffering from the ever so common effects of downsizing. These individuals have a set of needs that make traditional career services difficult for them to access. Many are enrolled in classes via the Internet. Others may have to travel long distances and work full time. These are the non-traditional students. They are the ones who may be able to benefit from online services. It is important for the career services professional to visit with them and determine which ones may be good candidates for these types of services.

One of the benefits of providing career services online to non-traditional students is the ability to access the services at their convenience. This allows them the flexibility that they need to work around their busy schedules. Another advantage of the Internet is the ability to provide services when the client/student is ready to receive the services. This means outside the normal operating hours of most offices. Many of the services that can be offered online are services that the client could complete on their own with some follow-up support from a career professional.

There are several things to consider when determining who would be a good candidate for receiving services online. One important consideration is what level of comfort does the individual have for working on a computer. Does the individual have access to a computer and does it have the capability to access the Internet and utilize Internet technology in a timely manner. Some people do not have access to high-speed Internet that might be required to utilize certain programs or services. Most clients would probably be frustrated to find information that they needed and wanted only to find that they could not access the information because of computer or connectivity problems. The counselor must have a good understanding of the needs of the client. They must be familiar with the online resources that they direct the client to. The career professional must also be responsible in making contact with the client to make sure that they are continuing to make progress towards their career goals. If the individual is in a different geographic region the career professional must be able to refer the client to someone that can provide services if the counselor deems that the client is not making progress towards their stated goals.

**Process**

Once you have determined the clientele that will be utilizing your services you can decide what services you need to offer online. Most Career Services offices should choose to offer a full range of services. The newly revised National Career Development Guidelines can help to serve as a model for the services that you plan to offer online. A copy of the Guidelines can be downloaded from America’s Career Resource Network, at [http://www.acrnetwork.org/default.aspx](http://www.acrnetwork.org/default.aspx).

In order to offer a full range of career development services both career planning and career counseling services need to be offered. This can be structured under three different domains, as set forth in the National Career Development Guidelines; they are Personal and Social Development, Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning, and Career Management.

**Assessment**

Services offered under the domain of Personal and Social Development would include personality assessments,
interest inventories, and aptitude tests as well as work value assessments. There are many well known and validated inventories that are available for a fee. There are also some that are available online free of charge. It is important to have a variety of assessments available for your clients/students as they might find that some may be more helpful and enjoyable than others. It is important that the individual find the assessments enjoyable and not arduous. We need to keep in mind that self-discovery should have an element of fun to it.

Some of the more popular programs that contain assessments are Choices, Discover, and SIGI Plus. These programs are now available in a web-based format. They also contain several databases so that the main role is not simply self-assessment. They allow the individual to research many different careers and colleges that offer majors that would lead to specific career outcomes. A list of some excellent resources is available online at NCDA's website, http://www.ncda.org. Many of these resources are based on the work of Dr. John Holland.

Once assessments have been completed it is imperative that they be interpreted by a qualified career professional. Some assessments may have been validated for self-help. Even when using such assessments the career professional has a responsibility to be in contact with the client to insure that he/she has an accurate understanding of the results.

Exploration

After a person has completed a variety of assessment instruments and reviewed the results with a career professional the next step is to do exploration based on the results of the assessments. This is one step in the career counseling process that is well suited to the Internet. There are numerous websites that are dedicated to providing career information. One of the advantages of the Internet for career exploration is that the information is typically very current. Information on the Internet is easily updated. The information can be easily accessed from any computer that has Internet access. Another important consideration is that when you compare the cost of written materials versus online, as well as timeliness and accessibility, online resources make a lot more sense.

It is important however, to have some type of system to evaluate the career information websites and programs that your website utilizes. The Association of Computer-based Systems for Career Information (ACSCI) is an organization that has developed standards that can help you to do this evaluation. Many people submitting RFP's will use the guidelines to reference the evaluation standards they will use. These guidelines are voluntary and any organization completing the evaluation can post on their website or program the level of the standard that they meet. There are a total of four levels of standard. They are: Core Standards, Component Standards, Integration Standards and the highest level is Comprehensive System Standards. Learn more about ACSCI from their website at http://www.acsci.org.

Sites that are included on the NCDA website under Internet Resources meet these standards. The ACSCI guidelines evaluate career information websites and programs based on different elements such as: accuracy of information, how current the information is, developmental appropriateness for the target population, as well as several other factors.

One group of resources that many people do not consider is professional associations. They are a source that typically has current and relevant information that is an inside source. Many of these types of sites have career information specifically for students. Exploring these sites gives the reader information and knowledge that helps them to discuss career concerns with professionals who are employed in the field.
Things that need to be considered within the domain of research are topics such as job descriptions, career ladder, job outlook, labor market information, informational interviews, job shadowing and internships. As the client/student does more exploration the level of commitment towards an occupation will begin to increase or decrease.

The tools that you can place on your website to help with exploration can be materials that you have developed yourself. They may be activities that are a part of a career development software program, some of which have previously been mentioned. Many of these types of programs offer a full range of career services that include career exploration components, as well as activities that are crucial to career development and planning. Some links that students may find helpful would be from state employment or workforce offices, the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Occupational Outlook Handbook to name a few.

Job shadowing is also an important part of the career exploration process. There are many websites and programs that are available with video clips that allow a small window of opportunity to job shadow. Sometimes students need help in linking up with an individual to job shadow. One good way to help with this is to have a list of alumni that are willing to mentor students. Some of this activity can be via email. Once a relationship is built students can arrange to do some job shadowing. It is important however, that you do not exhaust your resources by bombarding them with students.

Decision Making

As a person moves through the first steps of self-knowledge and personal development and on to exploration and research they reach a point when a decision must be made about their future direction. This is when the client/student will call on the previous research that they have conducted to help them in making a decision. There are many different models that a person can use to help them make a decision. As a career professional you may already have a decision making model that you have developed or one that you have used in the past that you feel has worked well with clients/students.

Many models start with the concept that the individual needs to have a vision for their life that includes objectives for their career and their personal life. Regardless of the methodology, the client/student needs to have a realization that they need to make a decision. In order to do this they will utilize information they have learned about themselves from personality, interest and values assessments. Utilizing this information they can develop a list of occupational possibilities. The next step would be to do a comparative evaluation based on the research materials that they have gathered. The evaluation should take into consideration labor market information, such as expected salary or earning potential, future employment outlook, the individual's ability to complete the necessary education, and the person's aptitude and desire to work in the chosen field.

Career Planning

So far the elements that have been discussed lie primarily in the realm of career counseling. In order to provide a broader range of services this discussion will discuss elements that I will term career planning. These elements are typically specific topics that have the goal of helping the client/student obtain employment. Some things that you can address on your website in this category would be job search strategies. In this part you can help provide your client with resources that will help them in the job search process. They will also learn how to find new prospecting sources.
One part of career planning would include resume and letter writing. This will obviously include techniques and examples of resumes. Other important types of correspondence include prospecting letters, cover letters, thank you letters and acceptance letters.

Networking is another important skill that students need to master. They need to understand that most jobs that are available are not advertised and exist in the hidden market. Through networking they can discover these opportunities and they may find that they have an advocate on the inside. It is important that the student understand that employers want to hire someone that is a known quantity. If someone on the inside knows you, they can testify as to your abilities and how you would fit in the office.

Interview Preparation

It is not enough that a student have a good resume and is actively networking; they must be prepared for the interview. This is a vital part of the services that you offer online. Interviewees must understand what type of information the interviewer wants to know. They need to understand that the employer wants to know that he or she will be a good “fit” and that they can do the job. The student needs to be prepared by doing research about the company they are interviewing with prior to the interview. This lets the interviewer know that they have done their “homework” and it prepares them to ask intelligent questions. They should also be prepared to answer specific questions.

Students should also be familiar with e-recruiting and electronic resumes. Many companies are utilizing software to recruit and process applicants. Students need to feel comfortable applying online and filling out employee profiles. Many companies use this method as a precursor to hiring for future openings in the organization.

Another important part of preparing for an interview is making sure that the student knows how to dress appropriately. The student must realize that dress for work and dress for college are typically not considered the same by most employers. You can post information on your website that you have developed or there are many links available to direct clients to regarding this subject.

A final consideration for program content would be to provide students with information to educate and prepare them to make career decisions that will benefit them in the future. Students need to realize that the world of work and the economy is constantly changing along with technology. They need to learn to be flexible and continue their education and training through seminars, organizations and coursework.

Technology

Internet technology has given people the opportunity to provide learning experiences using many varied modalities. Technology is the platform that you will use to develop your website and provide the services. The Internet must be viewed as a tool that can be used to provide services to a greater number of people.

Below is a list of commonly used modalities in providing online career services. Some are used in higher quality sites and demonstrate an excellent use of the technology. Some may be ones that you are familiar with and may have used in other realms.
Streaming Audio & Video

There are two types of streaming audio and video. One form is asynchronous and the other is synchronous. These are both good modalities to provide information to individuals that visit your website. The synchronous format is in real time and thus allows viewers the opportunity to be active participants. They can respond and ask questions via email or phone. Some problems that are encountered with this modality tend to be as a result of connection speeds. These types of media require that the recipient have high speed Internet connections.

A variation of the streaming audio and video is the addition of a presentation via a software application like PowerPoint. This addition is good because the student can download a copy of the presentation. This can be done prior to the presentation and it allows the student to make notes as they follow along. The student could download afterwards and use the information for later study.

Chat Rooms

Chat rooms are a good platform for students to meet with a career professional online and ask questions on any subject related to career development. This setting is similar to a group counseling setting. It gives students the opportunity to talk about career issues that they may have concerns about. It gives them the opportunity to chat about and process many decisions and career experiences. It also allows them to talk about internships and co-ops that they might have found to be a great learning experience. This is also a good mode because many students are already very familiar with chat rooms and may feel comfortable within these venues.

Bulletin Boards

Bulletin Boards are a great place for students to go and post career questions. A career guidance professional can monitor the site and post answers to client’s/student’s questions. Career information, labor market information and other questions can be addressed by dividing such topics into smaller forum settings. You can have professionals with different career backgrounds address different topics from week to week. This gives students an opportunity to ask questions of professionals who are working in a field that they are interested in. It is important to make note that there must be some guidelines regarding postings to bulletin boards.

Blogs

Blogs are another relatively new Internet platform. In many ways they are like an individual’s personal website yet it is more like a diary. This can be a good way for students to discuss and read about fellow student’s successes and struggles. It can also be a source of encouragement.

eBooks

The eBooks are relatively new and offer several possibilities. You can purchase eBooks, download and read them. Some people may want to print the book out if it is not too long. Talk with your librarian. In some cases the library may
have access to several copies of a particular book that is e-based. In these situations the student can “Check Out” a book and maintain access to it for a set number of days. Check with your librarian for more specific information about eBooks.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter we have looked at issues and steps you can take to develop your own website. We have discussed the National Career Development Guidelines and the three domains that form their structure, Personal and Social Development, Educational Achievement and Lifelong Learning as well as Career Management. If you follow this format you will have the foundations of a useful and helpful website.

It is important to remember that there are many helpful websites that you can find through Internet searches. It is important to know what is on these sites, how they are related and how they can help the client or student meet their goals.

It is important to review the institution’s mission statement and make sure that your website reflects its goals. In most cases you will probably find that this will drive the types of services that students will be searching for. You will also find that budgets will influence the type of technology you can afford. Even if you have an extremely limited budget there are some programs that are web-based that will help you to provide the services that your students need.

Best Practices

http://www.yorku.ca/careers/cyberguide/index.html

http://www.cdm.uwaterloo.ca/index.asp

Resources

American Counseling Association, http://www.counseling.org//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home


http://vc.tjc.edu/StudentSupport/Monograph/career.htm