HE COVID-19 SUPPORT

Transitioning Student Services to Online Delivery

May 2020

In the following report, Hanover Research explores best practices and exemplary models for institutions moving student services online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions of all sizes – many without the infrastructure for online education– are being forced to move student services to distance delivery. Given that this crisis coincides with an existing shift towards online learning in higher education, some leaders in the field predict that institutions which embrace online platforms will flourish in coming years. In the context of student support services, this could eventually mean developing more advanced online offerings such as "One-Stop Centers." **This report focuses on how institutions can respond to the current pandemic and prioritize their services in the near term.**

For further information on best practices in developing online support systems, institutions should consult the following Hanover Research reports:

- ❖ **Student Services for Distance and Online Students** - This report presents the results of a best practices analysis of student services for distance and online students.

- ❖ **Benchmarking Analysis: Building Community in the Time of COVID-19** – This report summarizes research on community building activities and strategies across 22 liberal arts institutions in the U.S., highlighting messages from college leadership, online presence, and faculty and staff engagement.

- ❖ **Best Practices in Virtual Admissions** – In this study, Hanover reviews recommendations and presents case studies of approaches to online admissions practices and events, including student-driven social media and how to integrate different channels and technologies.

- ❖ **Best Practices in Virtual Student Engagement** – This report summarizes secondary literature and institutional websites to determine best practices and provide innovative examples of non-academic virtual student engagement.

- ❖ **Benchmarking Student Mental Health Services** – This report presents the results of a benchmarking analysis of graduate student mental health services in the United States with recommendations and key findings. The review considers trends, specific offerings at different Association of American Universities (AAU) member institutions, and identifies links to specific services and fees.

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BEST PRACTICES

PRIORITY STUDENT SERVICES

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) provides institutions with best practices as to how to continue to support and engage with students at various points in their academic experience. Institutions should be prepared to support students at the beginning of their higher education experience via academic advising and integrating them into the institution's community, the end of their education via career services, and all points in between.

Ensure Continuity of Programs and Services

•Institutions should begin by continuing to offer the same services and programs that they would otherwise offer on-campus, attempting to ensure continuity in the student experience. As a next step, institutions should consider how services and events with physical requirements can be modified for online delivery (e.g., workshops).

Host Virtual Career Services

•Institutions can shift on-campus job fairs to virtual formats, where students can use breakout rooms to meet individually with employers. Career center staff can support institutions by offering online mock interview sessions and critiquing students' resumes and cover letters through document sharing platforms.

Offer Virtual Registration Services

•As students begin to register for fall courses, faculty advisors can shift from in-person meetings to virtual meetings through the learning management system (LMS) or third-party applications such as Zoom or Google Hangouts. Screencast tools like Screencast-O-Matic can enable advisors help students to navigate the online registration process.

Provide Mental Health and Well-Being Services

•Institutions can provide counseling and telehealth appointments virtually through HIPAA-compliant mechanisms. College Counseling from a Distance (HEMHA) provides details on how to "provide mental health services confidentially and legally in online environments."

Use Social Media to Stay Connected with Students

•Social media can help institutions to engage with students in more comprehensive ways than an LMS alone. Institutions should also diversify their offerings, avoiding overwhelming students with "dozens of Zoom meetings on different topics [and instead get] creative and leverage technology to innovate." The NASPA report Online and Engaged: Innovative Student Affairs Practices for Online Learner Success offers "additional best practices, innovative ideas, and strategies to support online learners."

Source: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators

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BEST PRACTICES

INITIAL STEPS IN STUDENT SUPPORT

As institutions consider what student support services to prioritize for adapting to distance formats, some expert recommendations include:

Administer a Pulse Survey

Surveys can answer questions such as: What are students worried about? What academic supports would they like to see? Which students feel they are in danger of failing or struggling in a class?

Develop a Centralized Information Hub

Webpages can provide students with information on how to access support services as well as host resources (such as in-house or third-party workshops and guides on how students can be successful online learners).

Utilize Existing LMS System

Though often seen as an academic-oriented platform, support offices can create virtual "classrooms" on the LMS for different student groups (e.g., certain financial aid recipients) through which they can deliver targeted announcements, workshops, or other resources.

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutions should develop a unified communication strategy.

The strategy should include aspects such as which offices and staff members are responsible for responding to certain inquiries (e.g., if a student posts on an office's social media page), what platforms the institution and its various offices will use for communication, and which staff require training.

Support offices should offer flexible service hours.

Flexible hours can ensure that students are able to access support services more easily, as well as benefit staff members who may have newfound responsibilities at home.

OTHER RESOURCES

Innovative Educators **offers a series of free webinars on more specific subjects related to online student services.**

- Taking Student Services Online In Response To COVID-19

- Building An Online Orientation For Specific Student Populations

- Move Your Orientation Online In Time For Summer Using Go2Orientation

- Onboarding Online: Using Technology To Redesign Orientation

- Advising & Counseling Online: Responding Effectively To Academic & Mental Health Issues

- Training Tutors For The Online Environment

Source: Innovative Educators

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BEST PRACTICES ACROSS STUDENT SERVICES

In addition to prioritizing student services, colleges can adopt institution-wide practices to ensure more adequate student supports.

In an article for *Inside Higher Ed*, one expert outlined several practices that student affairs and academic support staff can use to help foster student success in the new online environment.

Use LMS data as an early alert. These data can include metrics identifying which students have not engaged on the LMS for more than one week, and staff can generate a system to reach out to these students and their faculty "so as to understand their situation and nudge their online engagement." LMS data can also be integrated into predictive models using metrics commonly linked with retention.

Collect feedback from students about their experience with online learning. Solicited feedback can help reach students who may not be comfortable seeking help, guide an office's outreach efforts, and identify new warning indicators such as "attendance at orientation [or] welcome events."

Implement a coaching program. Student-centered programs can direct students to specialized resources for their specific needs, and coaches can use survey data to contact students who are "struggling or who expressed a desire for someone to reach out to them." These virtual coaching sessions might include "conversations about academic behaviors, financial matters, social integration, personal struggles, career guidance, self-care, or setting priorities."

Source: Inside Higher Ed

EXAMPLE CASES

Champlain College: LMS Early Alerts

The College identifies "students most in need of academic intervention by highlighting 'risk phrases' in students' online discussion board posts. The institution developed a list of frequently used key words and phrases that signal academic risk, (e.g., **help!, tried over and over, frustrated, don't understand**). An automatic script identifies all instances of the words in posts, and instructors are provided a prioritized list of students to proactively contact."

Baylor University: Coaching Program

The new Bear Care Coaching program was prepared with "countless hours" of planning over two weeks, responding to survey data that indicated 7,000 Baylor students self-identified as needing support. Over 330 University staff volunteered to serve as coaches, who reach out to "assigned groups of students each week to help them navigate the stresses of remote online education." The coaches were trained with several "short videos made by existing staff about how to coach, how to log comments in a database, and how to connect students to other campus resources."

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ **Initiate dialogue between students within majors, clubs, and organizations**.
- ❖ **Be available to students outside 8 a.m. to 5 p.m**.
- ❖ **Focus on students who are at greatest risk of dropping out**.
- ❖ **Hold office hours, and be available during flexible times.**

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OVERVIEW

Alma College advertises a wide range of academic support services for students as its Center for Student Opportunity office moves to an online format.

Though Alma College is a small private institution of just 1,433 students, the College has rapidly rolled out online student services and articulated these offerings clearly to students. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic will pose a particularly acute challenge to small liberal arts institutions, the College may serve as a model to other resource-constrained liberal arts institutions which focus primarily on traditional, campus-based learning.

The College offers a formal, one-credit *Strategic Learning Class* that helps students adjust to their new learning modality.

The goal of this class is to increase students' understanding of the online learning process and encourage skills that help enhance their performance. The course spans seven weeks of the semester.

The four sections of this module include:

- **Basics**: "adjusting to college, time management, organization"
- **Strategic Learning**: "learning styles, note taking, study skills, exam skills"
- **Personal Awareness**: "managing stress, staying healthy, balancing workload"
- **Moving Forward**: "academic plan, goal setting, career exploration"

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

Advertised academic support services on Alma College's webpage

Individual Appointments
- Students desiring one-on-one assistance can make individual appointments with an academic support specialist to discuss difficulties, identify needs, find resources, and develop a plan for improvement. **Appointments will be offered either via phone or virtually through Google Hangouts.**

Tutoring
- Peer tutoring is available free of charge for Alma College students. **All tutoring services will be offered via Google Hangouts.**

Supplementation Instruction
- SI is a resource in which a peer SI Leader attends class and hosts 1-2 study sessions each week. This is different from the tutoring program as it is meant to foster collaborative learning among the participants in a group setting. SI can also happen in conjunction with tutoring. **All SI sessions have been moved online via Google Hangouts.**

Workshops
- Workshops on a variety of topics are offered regularly throughout the term. Some of the general topics include time management, note taking, study skills, test taking, organization, learning strategies and stress management.

Strategic Learning Class
- The goal of this class is to increase understanding of the learning process and help students develop skills that can enhance performance. This is a 1 credit class that spans over seven weeks of the semester.

Source: Alma College
Note: Descriptions are taken verbatim from institution's webpage.

ACADEMIC SERVICES

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCO) has published a range of resources to help its colleges adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include a preparation **checklist** (see below) and a range of **third-party resources**:

- Wellness Central: "a free online health and wellness resource...Resources include stress relief and cold + flu modules."

- Tutoring can be moved online using the Pisces platform. CCCO published a training resource.

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Selected challenges from CCCO's Moving Instruction and Student Services Online Preparation Checklist

Challenges	Solutions
Provide students access to critical student services, including financial aid and admissions.	Provide virtual services using the Cranium Cafe (ConexEd) platform.
Provide students with counseling appointments.	Convert in-person appointments to online using SARS or other scheduling system and then hold appointments using Cranium Cafe (ConexEd).
Provide students access to tutoring.	Host online tutoring sessions using the Pisces online tutoring platform.

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office

CAREER SERVICES

Western Michigan University's Zhang Career Center has transitioned "to remote advising appointments and offering instruction on topics like building a professional resume, LinkedIn profile best practices, business etiquette and others via video."

Career Advisor Appointments are available each day for students and alumni. Preference is for WebEX or Microsoft Teams, but the office can accommodate students without video capability.

The Business Externship Program has also been moved to an online format. **In-person workshops** have been moved to WebEx, and an **Elearning site** has been developed for the program. On the site, students can "submit preparation work for the program, attendance at workshops can be tracked, and quizzes and other accountability tools are available."

The Center "is working individually with the over 50 companies...to adapt the program to meet all guidelines recommended by the state of Michigan....Some companies are postponing site visits, some are doing **virtual one-on-one mentorship** and others are creating **tailored virtual experiences**...[Other] businesses are willing to schedule visits to their companies in later summer or fall, pending that ability, and all have expressed willingness to share content virtually and continue to connect with students for mentorship."

> "The career center's online services, such as resume critiques, practice interviews, and assistance with job and internship searches, is beyond beneficial."

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VIRTUAL STUDENT SERVICES GUIDE

Eastern Florida State College (EFSC) provides students with a comprehensive resource webpage on which they can find information about various services while engaged in online learning. The following table provides details about select services, the impact of COVID-19 on these, and EFSC's response.

Service Area (selected)	Impact (selected)
Financial Aid	• Financial Aid specialists are available by email at finaid@easternflorida.edu and by phone at 321-433-7339, Monday - Thursday, 8 AM to 7 PM.
Prospective Students/Student Recruitment Office	• Schedule a phone or virtual application assistance appointment to receive one-on-one assistance during the COVID-19 school closure. • All campus tours scheduled previously for Spring Term are canceled. Please visit our virtual campus tour to browse maps, images and videos of EFSC's four campus locations. • The Student Recruitment Office...phone and video conference appointments are available during the closure to assist you with all your enrollment needs. Visit the Virtual Recruitment Office to make an appointment. Appointments are strongly encouraged; however, prospective students may still call 321-433-5497 or email recruiting@easternflorida.edu with any questions.
Academic Advising	• EFSC Advisors are assisting students via email or through Live Chat with an Advisor (Monday - Thursday, 8 AM - 7 PM). • **Current students** can contact their advisor directly through the contact information in myGPS, EFSC's web-based academic-advising and degree audit tool. You can also email advising through the choices by campus below.
Tutoring: Academic Success Centers and Writing Centers	• Due to COVID-19, all Academic Success Center and Writing Center services will be offered online for the remainder of the Spring Term. View the virtual tutoring how-to page for instructions on using the system (no appointment is needed). Tutoring will take place through Microsoft Teams, which is free to EFSC students. • Success Advisors are available to assist you with the transition to online learning. Whether you are setting up your Titan email, navigating your courses in Canvas, scheduling a virtual tutoring session with an ASC tutor or connecting to another EFSC department, we can help. Connect with a Success Advisor by phone, email or live chat.
Disability/Accessibility Services: Student Access for Improved Learning (SAIL)	• The SAIL team is available to assist students and faculty via email, phone, chat and/or virtual meetings, as needed, Monday through Thursday, 7:30 AM to 5:00 PM. We understand that students have differing needs, and we are prepared to support you through our interactive and individualized process. For additional information and contacts, please visit the SAIL web page.
Career Planning and Development Center	• All Career Planning and Development Center in-person student and employer events have been canceled for Spring Term. Career Center Staff are available to assist students via email, phone or Microsoft Teams, including consultations and access to virtual career assessment tools. To schedule a virtual appointment, visit us through Microsoft Teams or email or call the Career Center Coordinator on your Campus: • Internship Office staff also are available to assist students via email or phone. To schedule a virtual appointment, please email or call an Internship Office representative: • Students can also search for jobs and internships 24/7 via the College Central Network. (Employers: Please register with the College Central Network to post job and internship openings for EFSC students.)
TRiO Student Support Services *(Retention)*	• The TRiO team is here for you during this unprecedented time. For the safety of everyone, our services are currently being conducted remotely, including a virtual process for new students to apply for TRiO support services. Please visit our TRiO web page for more information, plus email and phone contacts, and we will respond as quickly as possible. • We will continue to communicate via the Remind texting system. We are also utilizing Microsoft Teams and will be in touch soon to discuss your needs and the ways in which we can support you. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact us with any academic questions or concerns. We will work with you to identify resources that can help.
EFSCares Student Counseling	• EFSCares, our student assistance program that provides crisis intervention, resource/referral assistance and one-on-one counseling, remains operational. Call Gee Resolutions (which partners with EFSC) at 321-631-8569, and let them know you are an EFSC student. You will need to provide your student ID B number. Until further notice, all sessions, appointments, meetings and other business will be conducted virtually through TeleHealth Services.

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Source: Eastern Florida State College
Note: Impacts are taken verbatim (abbreviated) from institution webpage.