

Leadership Vision and E-Learning Plan

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Introduction

It's been said that if there is one constant in the world, it is change. The world of education is no different. There have always been new ways of teaching, new ways of learning, and new ways of making sure that teaching and learning lead to desirable results. In the 21st century the greatest accelerator of education is technology. Through technology education has become mobile, portable, and able to reach those who would otherwise be unable to receive it. Technology has also allowed education to become highly individualized and adaptable to the point that two students in the same class may each end up with their own unique experience tailored just for them.

One area that is often overlooked, however, is academic support, or tutoring, at the college level. According to Cooper (2010), tutoring has been shown to improve student learning across many subjects and age groups, yet many of today's higher ed-based learning centers have difficulty in finding and employing new technology that can offer added benefits to the students that they serve. The following proposal details my plan to incorporate technology into a suburban community college's writing center, the objectives that this will accomplish, and ways to finance this endeavor.

Vision

I find that education is becoming more and more individualized to suite each student. Even with all the developments in online and blended learning, it is difficult to create one lesson the effectively teaches all students. As Waugh and Su (2015) write, it is exceedingly difficult to design even an online class that is flexible enough to cover the needs of all students while maintaining the necessary structure needed to propel the students forward. Yet not only does the one-size-fits-all approach not fit all students, in fact it pushes some of them away, and they are

usually the students who need the most assistance. New advances in educational technology, however, may allow for the creation of individualized pathways for each student, where their strengths are played too and their weaknesses are discovered, assessed, and specifically focused on.

My vision is the increase of college tutoring centers, specifically writing centers, and the technology that they use to individually assist students. For this proposal I will talk about Northern New Jersey Community College, a two-year, open-access institution serving over 14,000 students. This school has a high level of non-traditional students, as well as those with special needs who require specialized assistance. Approximately 7,000 students, 50% of those registered, seek assistance at the tutoring center at some point during the academic year, with approximately 1,500 utilizing the writing center each semester.

Currently, there is little technology used in the writing center other than computers used for typing papers in word processing software, and the occasional Google search or perusal of the library's JSTOR catalogue. At this time, through only face-to-face interaction, which is limited to two 50-minute sessions per week, students who take advantage of the writing center for assistance already receive higher grades and show higher levels of retention and graduation than students who do not use the center at all. Horn and Staker (2015) write that blended learning, incorporating online assistance with face-to-face instruction, is highly beneficial. In an effort to further increase student GPAs, retention rates, and graduation rates, developing a blended learning approach to the writing center could be of great benefit to not only the students who take full advantage of it already, but especially those students who are unable to regularly attend tutoring sessions because of either their schedule or tutor availability.

This proposal calls for the implementation of an adaptive reading software, from Lumen Learning, as well as the creation of an in-house asynchronous system, utilizing the college's already in place microfiche system, that allows students to upload essays and have a tutor based in the college's writing center offer feedback on it. The tutoring center currently offers online tutoring through a third party company named TutorMe, however this system is expensive and the cost limits the number of online sessions the students can have. Also, because TutorMe uses off-sight tutors, they do not have the same familiarity with the courses and instructors as the in-house tutors do, many of whom have taken the exact same courses with the same faculty.

The reason for the adaptive reading software is because many students ask for reading assistance, but because certified reading specialists are hard to come by, especially those looking for work in writing centers, the task falls to tutors who are not expressly trained in the area and therefore can only give limited feedback. There is also no "reading" class offered by the school, and the possibility of that ever happened is nil considering the push to get rid of developmental and remedial coursework (Mangan, 2019).

E-Learning Plan

In order to follow through with my vision, there are several different areas that need to be addressed. The first thing is to answer the following question: What would I need to do as a leader in this situation and environment to make my vision come to reality? To begin, I need to establish support from various individuals because I do not have the authority to purchase new software or create brand new initiatives without the endorsement of the Managing Director of Learning Assistance Services.

I will begin a proposal showing what the issue is, my solution to the problem, and the effect on our students. I need fully explain both prongs of my plan, adding adaptive reading

software and also creating an in-house asynchronous essay assistance program. This explanation will show the number of students requesting reading assistance during previous semesters, along with how many of them we were actually able to assist one-on-one. By doing this, I will be able to expose a need that the students are displaying. By offering Lumen Learning as a solution, I can give estimates on how many more students would be served. I will also show the number of online tutoring hours that have been spent on students uploading essays for feedback and explain how that by initiating our own in-house program this will free up hours that can be utilized for other high traffic subjects.

A demo with the Lumen Learning team will be scheduled for myself and my Managing Director so that she will see what the software can offer our students and how it works. This software will be available in the writing center where students will be able to use it without needing a tutor to sit with them. Of course there will be tutors available if they have a question, but it will also free these tutors up to work with other students as well along with offering the students a service for a need that we really cannot offer at the current time.

With my Managing Director on board, the next step would be to present the idea to the English faculty. This is traditionally the most difficult part. Many of the faculty are not in favor of utilizing this kind of technology, however, the argument can be made that the students are asking for a service, reading help, that is not being offered in any other way. Because of this, by offering the students reading help not only will this need be met but the faculty should see improvements in their own classes since they will no longer need to stop their instruction to assist one student who is expressing difficulty in understanding a reading assignment. I also want to be very transparent with the faculty when it comes to exactly what I am doing in the writing center. I want them to be assured that my goal is to help their students become independent

learners who can go and take what they learn in the writing center and apply it to their classroom studies.

For the creation of the in-house asynchronous essay assistance program, the road will be much easier. Working with our in-house developers, we have already created a system for tutor applicants to fill out and upload their applications to the tutoring center. The applications go to the Office Services Supervisor, who then assigns them to their respective supervisor, such as math, science, or writing. Using this same type of approach, it can easily be configured to have students upload their essays which are sent to the Writing Center Supervisor. The Writing Center Supervisor is then able to assign the essay to any tutor they wish, who will have 48 hours to offer feedback by using the Track Changes function in MS Word and send it back to the student.

This will also require a written proposal stating the issue and the solution that I have developed. Only the Managing Director of Learning Assistance Services needs to approve this before work on it can be started. Not only that, but its implementation can be carried out within a one semester timeframe. This will offer the added benefit that tutors who find themselves not assisting a student will be able to be utilized, thus increasing their own utilization rates and in effect not wasting money by paying someone to do nothing.

There are change issues that I will have to deal with in a few different areas. When it comes to the software, the first is to make sure that the English faculty are comfortable with the addition of reading assistance software. To effectively manage this situation, I need to think ahead and try to figure out the issues that they believe will arise. Then, I would need to create effective arguments for why this initiative will be successful and why those issues will either not arise or why they will be able to be effectively handled before they cause any concerns. The

second change issue with the software is effectively training the tutors who staff the writing center to be able to offer help to the students who come in to use the software.

With the addition of the online asynchronous essay assistance, the only changes that need to be managed are, again, training the tutors to make sure that they are familiar with how to use the Track Changes function in MS Word and how to upload the paper back to the student, and promoting this service to the students. Students rarely read the daily email sent to them from the college, so a more targeted approach is needed. The email addresses for students in writing intensive courses can be collected and a targeted email, using mail merge, can be sent to them individually introducing the new program.

Leadership values and behaviors that I will have to develop in order to accomplish this are all aimed at dealing directly with the faculty. In the past I have been reluctant to challenge faculty on best practices in the Writing Center, even though that is my area of expertise. Now, after 10 years in my position and with multiple awards, I believe that I have the clout to make a strong case and effectively sell my ideas. This will not be easy as I am not very assertive by nature, but as leader who knows the right thing to do, I will have to stand firm in my beliefs and not let other people's fear of technology negatively effect the assistance that the students can and should receive.

Organizational issues, like the ones described, above are the most difficult part of implementing any idea. I think that the key is to prepare a proposal that accurately foresees most of the objections that will occur so that not only will there be an answer for why that objection is not valid, but it will also show that there has been a great deal of forethought put into this and that other people's concerns have been anticipated and appreciated. Putting others at ease by showing them that you know what you are doing, that you're not acting hastily with limited

information, would seem to be a key part of being a leader. Knowing that the person spearheading an initiative has put considerable thought into something before enacting it goes far in creating an environment of respect.

Funding Proposal

Funding is an extremely important part of any initiative. The funding for this project should be relatively straightforward. For the implementation of the online asynchronous essay assistance, there is no additional cost. In fact, this initiative will actually improve the utilization rates for writing tutors, assuring that there is always “something to do.” Currently, utilization rates are around 60% on average, which means that most tutors are physically working with a student only a little more than half of the time they are on the clock. By giving the students another way to receive help, this down time can be used to work on the uploaded essays that need support. This actually provides a greater ROI (Return On Investment) than is being received now.

For the implementation of Lumen Learning, the matter is a little different. While there is a departmental budget for technology, it likely will not be enough to cover the cost, as licenses for the software are usually purchased based on the size of the student body. There are alternative ways to fund this than with Learning Assistance Center only money. For one, the English department also has funding for technology which can be directed towards this project. This is why it is so important to create a proposal and presentation for those members to see how this can actually help their students. The second way is through grants.

There are two different grant opportunities that can be used for the funding of this project. This first is a Title V federal grant that the college already has and has already allocated money towards the tutoring center and the writing center in particular. This grant covers students

in gateway courses, which include Writing 101 and Writing 201, the two classes with the highest enrollment in the college and the two classes that send the most students to the writing center.

Using money from this grant to purchase the software would make sense and be appropriate. The second grant is a federal Student Support Services opportunity, of which I will be leading the writing of. This grant allocates \$220,000 per academic year for five years to a winning institution. There are many projects that this grant can fund, and since I am the primary person putting the proposal together I can make sure that there is funding for my program.

Both of these initiatives will give opportunities to students where they do not currently exist. Students have demonstrated interest in both of these ideas and would welcome the addition of these services. Both will also make not only classroom teachers more effective, but they will make the tutors more effective as well. Students who cannot attend the writing center because of work, family, or just their schedules, will now have the opportunity to have their essays looked at by a tutor. This leads to better grades, which leads to higher retention rates, which eventually leads to higher graduation rates, which is always a struggle at community colleges. Students who need assistance with reading will now be able to access that service as well, which took place in a very limited manner if at all. By improving their reading skills, this also leads to greater confidence, higher grades, and so on., which leads to higher graduation rates.

This also can lead to a better financial view for the college, as they are discovering that increasing new student enrollment does not bring in as much revenue as keeping the students that are already attending the college. At Northern New Jersey Community College, by lowering the number of students who stop attending between their first and second semesters by 15%, the losses caused by declining enrollment would be mitigated.

Conclusion

Every year, all of our programs assess various elements that they control. Assessing the effectiveness of these new writing center programs will use qualitative and quantitative measures. First, all students who use the writing center's services log in through a system called TutorTrac. This is connected with Colleague, the student management system that the college as a whole uses. TutorTrac can give reports on how many students used a particular service, how many times, for how long, who (if anyone) they worked with, and the students contact information. Using the students school email address, we can send a targeted survey to every student who used either the online asynchronous essay assistance or the adaptive reading software. The survey will allow students to rate various aspects of the program they used, as well as provide for an open-ended response.

Using TutorTrac we can also look up each student's ID number. With our Institutional Research department, we can be given a grade comparison for every student who took Writing 101 and used either program to students who took Writing 101 and did not utilize the services. This can give us some quantitative data on student performance and also let us track student perseverance (continuing from one semester to the next) as well as student graduation. Every year, this can be easily assessed to find what the overall patterns look like and gauge the effectiveness of the programs.

Works Cited

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