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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS CENTER

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Abstract

This study was conducted to describe the main issues that the Student Success Center faces when they provide students' support services, examine alternative solutions, and propose the solution from theoretical and practical perspectives. To critically analyze organizational problems regarding managing the Student Success Center for students, a literature review and evidence from interviewing workers and observation were utilized as a qualitative instrumental case study. Findings indicate that the key problems were reaching high-risk students and combining services with academic departments for effective tutoring. This case study can provide some insight and solutions into the educator, who needs best practices and services for college students as well as the impact that university leaders have on promoting students' success on campus.

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Introduction:-

While numerous national and state graduation programs seek to increase the number of students obtaining post-secondary degrees, many colleges and universities have not dramatically improved their completion rates (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Karp, 2011). Most of the students are unprepared to meet the demands of higher education and, as a result, face major problems outside the classroom that adversely affect their academic success (Helfgot, 2005; Teresh, 2015).

The Student Success Center (SSC) is designed to serve as a one-stop-shop where students can get an array of assistance on coursework, financial aid, study skills, choosing a major, course registration, stress management, and much more (EKU Student Success Center, 2018). Students attend tutoring services and workshops geared toward helping students with study skills and reading as well as coping with stress and anxiety. The SSC provides students with integrated advice, direction, and access to high-impact services that promote their success.

This case study is to investigate an organizational problem, examine alternative solutions, and propose the most effective solution using supporting evidence of the SSC at a state university in Kentucky. Through the information gathered and from observing and interviewing workers in the field, the key problems and issues were identified such as outreaching high-risk students and synchronizing academic departments with tutoring services. This study recommends the solution to an organizational problem in the SSC. They should find a way to serve high-risk students effectively by affiliating with academic departments to streamline tutoring services in order to ensure quality across campus.

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Statement of the Problem:-

The desire to earn a college degree is increasing among high-risk students, but they tend to lack the set of skills necessary for success in college. On the surface, one might define a high-risk student as one who has low grades. Several researchers found that grade-point-average was not a reliable predictor of success (Fowler and Boylan 2010; Laskey& Hetzel, 2011; Vance, 2016). Instead, they state that the best indicator of success for these students was attending a school with encouragement. This would help high-risk students build the skills they need to be successful in college.

Often, high-risk students arrive on campus unaware of the services they need or what help is available. In an effort to retain students, colleges and universities provide first-year students with bridge programs and other support. One common support service is tutoring; yet, under-prepared students often state that they do not need tutoring and/or that they study better in their dorm rooms. In fact, various researchers have found that high-risk students are less likely than college-ready students to use tutoring services (Solórzano et al., 2013).

There is substantial evidence from research to suggest that tutoring has a positive impact on high-risk students. In a study by Laskey and Hetzel (2011), high-risk students who went to tutoring were significantly more likely to continue to go to school and have a higher grade-point-average than those high-risk students who did not utilize tutoring services. Gallard et al. (2010) also concluded that early intervention by a tutoring center increases completion rates for college students, in particular, Hispanic students. This research shows high-risk students need tutoring services more than many other students for their academic success.

Several researchers have found that high-risk students do not use academic support services like tutoring. Engle et al. (2008) state that low-income and first-generation college students do not participate in campus activities, including services like tutoring. Solórzano et al. (2013) point out that student success is linked to behaviors such as seeking help and guidance. They found that low-income students are often concerned about the stigma of going to tutoring. Additionally, high-risk students often do not know what services are available or how to find tutoring. Furthermore, they may fear being judged, do not think they deserve help, or assert a desire to be self-reliant.

Hodges and White (2001) found that some high-risk students may overestimate their own academic skills, giving them unrealistic expectations of their success. Another challenge is that students have difficulties finding services (Boylan, 2009). They need to be able to access these services easily and systematically with appropriate facilitation or guidance.

To address these needs, colleges must help students understand and navigate the college environment, clarify their career goals, and managing multiple academic and personal priorities (Karp, 2011). With these non-academic supports as vital to student success, student assistance programs serve as the foundation of retention and completion initiatives (Dalton & Crosby, 2012; Habley et al., 2012; Manning et al., 2014). In order to effectively implement such initiatives, college employees, therefore, need the ability to develop appropriate interventions for a wide variety of students.

Alternatives

Students need financial, academic, and emotional support to graduate from college, and the services mentioned above are crucial to that end. Because of the financial need to admit high-risk students, the national trend across the country is for colleges and universities to establish offices devoted solely to student services. Separate from academic programs, these offices focus on the retention and graduation of students by offering an array of services on campuses such as advising, counseling, student health, housing, tutoring, supplemental instruction, student life, recreation, financial aid, etc. Tinto (2004) notes, “intervention from student services can have a strong impact on first-year students” (as cited in Vance, 2016). Even low-income students who enter college academically prepared but lack the family support to navigate college are benefited from these services, which are designed to meet those needs (Tinto, 2012).

In addition to maintaining momentum, early and sustained intervention improves the chances that high-risk students will remain in college. Kuh and the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (2006) stress the importance of early intervention. By establishing clear expectations early, providing regular feedback, and offering resources so that students can meet these expectations, students know what they need to do to be successful. Additionally, this

intervention should be sustained and implemented at key transition points during college. These interventions include orientation programs, tutoring, performance alert systems, mentoring, intrusive advising, financial aid, and others. To achieve this, academic offices and student services must partner to provide timely and appropriate approaches.

Tutoring has proven to be one of the most beneficial services if high-risk students can be convinced to use it. Unfortunately, research of Engle & O'Brien (2007) shows that the likelihood that high-risk students will use those services is low. These students are often unaware of how to use student support services. In addition, low-income students often have jobs, and student services may not be offered at a time convenient for them. Students are also frequently concerned about the stigma associated with using support services.

As an alternative, there should be some procedures or policies to guide tutoring and early intervention services for freshmen. Academic departments will be important in connecting students to these services. Because it is convenient for students to access services from their own department and faculty and staff who know what kind of services their high-risk students need. It will naturally lead high-risk students to attend student support services they need later. Generally, there is a freshman orientation for giving an abundance of service information regardless of the student's interests and needs. However, educators need to follow up with high-risk students individually according to what particular students' support services they need.

To make a real impact, the SSC should cooperate with faculty and staff members and combine academic departments. Since high-risk students are less likely to seek student support services, programs must consider what factors may contribute to that behavior and determine how to structure support so that they can resolve these issues. Once programs are able to motivate students to use the services and they begin to experience success, students develop a positive relationship with the university and begin to see success as something they can achieve.

Proposed Solution

Mandated Tutoring:

Vance (2016) points out that student success is linked to behaviors such as seeking help and support. The author found that low-income students are often concerned about the stigma of going to tutoring. They may fear being judged, do not think they deserve help, assert a desire to be self-reliant, or have an unrealistic expectation of their success.

According to Tinto (2004), Student Support Services (SSS) programs like TRIO, a program that serves first-generation students, have been shown to increase retention for first-generation students (as cited in Vance, 2016). In Hand and Payne's (2008) study of a SSS program in Appalachia, the students showed an internal locus of control, despite circumstances like finances that were often beyond their control. Some of the students in the study reported that they felt unprepared for college-level work. The researchers recommended mandatory academic services and tutoring not only to help students academically but also to help them to build relationships with others on campus.

Fowler and Boylan (2010) studied a program in which students signed a contract agreeing to "mandatory advising, tutoring, and attendance requirements" (p. 6). The results of the study were based on students who were required to participate in a summer program. The results were compared to a previous cohort with similar test scores and grade-point-averages who were not required to participate. The treatment group in the study had a significantly higher mean grade-point-average than the non-participants and was also retained at a larger percentage. A structured program with requirements such as mandatory tutoring can have a positive impact on student success.

Faculty Engagement:

The literature identifies a variety of ways that faculty are or can be included in tutoring programs. One way is through faculty promoting the use of tutoring by students. In a study of learning communities in college classrooms, faculty efforts to encourage study groups and tutoring paid off because students came to class better prepared than those who did not participate in these experiences outside of class time (Vance, 2016). Faculty encouragement includes students signing up for study groups before leaving class and even offering extra credit for participation. Additionally, faculty invite academic support resources to visit their classrooms to speak about their services.

One of the university's strongest tutoring practices is the engagement of faculty and the use of an early alert system. Their tutoring centers engage faculty in a variety of ways. Those centers coordinated by academic departments are

supervised by a faculty member. The other tutoring supervisors request tutor candidate recommendations from faculty and require letters from faculty for tutors to cover a subject. One center within an academic department at a university encourages faculty to hold their office hours within the tutoring center.

This universities also has an early-alert system, called Fourth Week Progress Reports that enables instructors to refer students to tutoring, for early-intervention. This system is successful as faculty actively engage in submitting reports, especially faculty members who have first-year students. Tutoring centers contact students from the reports following instructors' advice to students, and this outreach is effective. These centers see a marked increase in the number of students who check-in for tutoring after students receive their progress reports. An early-alert system will be one of the best solutions because faculty and staff cooperate for student success.

Combining with Academic departments:

Because of the importance of early intervention and the lack of help-seeking behaviors of high-risk students, a variety of researchers suggest developing a strategy to empower these students to seek academic support (Boylan, 2009; Gallard et al., 2010; Laskey& Hetzel, 2011). Sometimes these strategies lean towards programs that mandate the use of tutoring services. Hodges and White (2001) indicate that letting students self-monitor and verbal prompting was not effective in student attendance at student services. Thus, mandatory participation or involvement intentionally is needed with academic departments' support and cooperation.

Tutoring also provides sustained intervention, which is especially important for first-year college students during key transition points (Kuh& Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2006). Engle et al. (2008) assert that high-risk students must be approached and engaged differently than the traditional first-year student. One such service, tutoring, provides sustained support throughout college. By requiring tutoring time, colleges can make the best use of the time that high-risk students are on campus, which is often limited by jobs, commuting, and family obligations. Not only does this provide academic support, but it also enhances the sense of campus community that further engages high-risk students in college, increasing the chances of retention.

Recommendations:-

Students need financial, academic, and emotional support to graduate from college, and the services mentioned above are crucial to that end. Most of all, the following recommendations are offered for universities that desire to have a successful tutoring program to serve high-risk students:

First, colleges and universities should encourage further collaboration with faculty by involving faculty in interviewing tutor applicants. Additionally, faculty could be invited to hold office hours in tutoring centers to build collaborative networks between student services and academic programs.

Second, as colleges and universities enroll under-prepared students, they should put programs and policies into place that provide the impetus for high-risk students to use tutoring centers. One solution is implementing a policy that provides conditional admission to high-risk students with the requirement that they use tutoring services regularly.

Third, the SSC should provide centralized tutor training campus-wide to ensure students are receiving quality service from trained tutors. Moreover, they should cooperate with academic departments and faculty members in order to maintain quality services for high-risk students.

Overall, tutoring services can have a significant positive impact on the persistence, retention, and degree attainment for high-risk students. This case study supports this assertion and demonstrates that tutoring is effective as a strategy for success for high-risk students. Thus, educators need to encourage and facilitate undergraduates to seek help early and to empower them to take control of their education through the Student Success Center's services.

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