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Building Synchronous Student Support Services For Asynchronous Online Programs At a Small Private Liberal Arts Institution

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Consultancy Project Executive Summary

Organization:	Gardner-Webb University School of Education
Project Title:	BUILDING SYNCHRONOUS STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE PROGRAMS AT A SMALL PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION
Candidate:	Carly M. Pearce
Consultancy Coach:	Dr. Jeffrey Hamilton, Ed.D.
Defense Date:	June 26, 2020
Authorized by:	Stacy Gato/Vice President of Enrollment Management

Approval

This consultancy project was submitted by Carly M. Pearce under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Jeff Hamilton, Ed.D., Faculty Advisor
Gardner-Webb University

Date

Stacy Gato
Vice President of Enrollment Management

Date

Abstract

BUILDING SYNCHRONOUS STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE PROGRAMS AT A SMALL PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION. Pearce, Carly M., 2020: Consultancy Project, Gardner-Webb University.

Averett University was chartered in 1859 and has a strong history of embracing innovation and disruptive change. Institutions of higher education that desire to thrive in the future must remain 100% student centered and market driven. Institutions that embrace technological advancements can provide relevant and current educational opportunities through an assortment of affordable and accessible learning technologies. Recognizing the need to continually update its learning technologies and employ every educational delivery system in current demand, Averett's GPS program pivoted from an on ground teaching format to 100% asynchronous online in less than 5 years. However, the sudden shift in learning modality did not come without hardships and continued unforeseen challenges. My consultancy project addresses the need for synchronous student support services for asynchronous online learners.

Keywords: asynchronous, adult learner, Zoom, student support

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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Purpose

Background Information

Averett University is a small 4-year private liberal arts institution located in Danville, Virginia. Averett's Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) program is the nontraditional arm of the institution and has offered continuing education options for the nontraditional adult learner for over 30 years. Soon to be renamed "Averett Online," Averett's GPS program is now fully conducted in an asynchronous online format.

The mission of Averett University is to prepare students to serve and lead as catalysts for positive change. Averett fulfills this mission by educating students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and nations through liberal arts-based undergraduate and graduate programs in a personal, collegial, interdisciplinary environment. The vision of Averett University is to be a premier student-centered university renowned for innovative teaching and engaged learning

Challenges

Major challenges have occurred due to Averett's GPS program's shift from on ground classroom teaching to 100% asynchronous online. Observed loss of student connection to the institution and its people has been a challenge. Many face-to-face courses naturally produce connection to the institution and its support staff through the student's physical presence on the campus. Face-to-face learning environments, with standardized and rigid learning timeslots, naturally allow students to manage their time more effectively by giving them scheduled, focused, and uninterrupted learning opportunities in physical classroom settings. It also provides a natural environment for students to connect with each other, the institution, and its faculty and staff. These very connections promote student persistence and success. Asynchronous online learning allows students the flexibility to complete their coursework anywhere and on their own time but poses challenges when it comes to time management, connection, and student persistence.

Purpose of the Consultancy Project

The purpose of my consultancy project was to enhance Averett's student support tutoring services for its online asynchronous learners through the creation of face-to-face tutoring opportunities using Zoom's video conferencing platform and hiring Averett's own faculty, staff, and alumni to tutor. The tutoring program goal is to create organic connection to the institution and its people.

1.2 Associated Documents

The following documents are located in the Appendix:

- A Post Tutoring Student Satisfaction Survey
- B Student Appointment Page and Web Link
- C Averett's Strategic Plan for 2014-2020
- D Literature Review

1.3 Project Plan Maintenance

The project began in January 2018 with the support of Averett University's Vice President of Enrollment Management (VPEM) Stacy Gato. During this time, I worked very closely with Stacy Gato and Director of Student Services (DSS) Chris Ellis to implement the software platforms and maintain the tutoring program. Communication was handled through a mixture of face-to-face scheduled and impromptu meetings, phone calls, and email. Communication regarding operational aspects of the project occurred daily through impromptu office conversations, email, and phone calls. However, any major decisions or changes were discussed during scheduled face-to-face formal meetings.

2 Project Scope

2.1 Outline of Partnering Organization's Objectives

2.1.1 Objectives

Build synchronous student support tutoring services for Averett University GPS program. Objective: Develop a synchronous tutoring program for online learners to learn from Averett's faculty, staff, and alumni and create greater persistence and connection to the institution.

Averett's asynchronous online learning format affords students the flexibility to complete their coursework anywhere and on their own time but poses challenges when it comes to time management, connection, and student persistence. Averett recognizes the need to continually update its learning technologies and to employ every educational delivery system in current demand to provide a student-centered approach to student success. Through this project, we were able to deliver on the core elements of Averett's mission and vision of being a premier student-centered university renowned for innovative teaching and experiential learning. The ability for Averett to reach its vision and the core values of innovation and discovery relies on a strong, dynamic, student-centered approach. Improving student support tutoring services is key to Averett's ability to deliver on its strategic plan in each of the three key areas: student success, academic innovation, and strategic growth.

2.1.2 Success Criteria

The success criteria for Averett in this project were as follows:

1. Provide online asynchronous learners free access to synchronous tutoring services;
2. Engage online students and build connection to the university through robust student-centered student support;
3. Improve persistence and retention of its online learners; and
4. Create student-centered and technologically innovative educational opportunities using an innovative teaching and learning approach.

2.1.3 Risks

There was a partial level of risk for Averett in implementing this project. Averett did not have to earmark additional funds for this project but instead reallocate funds from existing unsuccessful student support services. There was, however, a risk of decreased retention and enrollment loss associated with not improving student support services for the online learner.

2.2 Outline of Student's Objectives

2.2.1 Objectives

My objectives were the same as Averett University.

1. Design and operationalize a tutoring program with online appointment booking opportunities through
 - a. the utilization of Acuity scheduling appointment software that is housed on multiple student platforms, and
 - b. increasing online student access to face-to face learning opportunities through the utilization of Acuity appointment scheduling software and Zoom video conferencing platform.

2. Implement a tutoring, recruitment, and onboarding process by hiring a part-time tutoring coordinator who is charged with training, creating, and maintaining a procedure manual. The recruitment and onboarding plan includes the following:
 - a. Advertisement campaign with job postings comprised of tutor advertisement on the internal faculty and staff newsletter "Coffeebreak,"
 - b. Email campaign blasts to recent alumni, and
 - c. Implement a paid tutor training program that is housed in Canvas that
 - i. Meets the College Reading and Learning Association standards for tutoring the adult learner,
 - ii. Trains tutors to utilize Zoom video conferencing platform effectively for tutoring, and
 - iii. Operationalizes new tutor onboarding payroll paperwork and timesheet submission for work performed by the tutors in the training process and for actual tutoring sessions.

3. Successfully market zoom tutoring to new, existing potential students by
 - a. Incorporating and educating new students during the new student orientation and student onboarding process;
 - b. Marketing zoom tutoring to existing students by
 - i. Including zoom tutoring resources on faculty syllabus templates,
 - ii. Notifying instructors by email 2 weeks prior to a class starting with a comprehensive list of tutoring resources,
 - iii. Building a student success resource folder in Canvas and housing Zoom tutoring resources; uploading the Student Success Resource folder in new and existing student Canvas shells, and
 - iv. Working with the GPS web designing and creating a landing page at gps.averett.edu/tutoring.

2.2.2 Success Criteria

My success criteria for this project included the following:

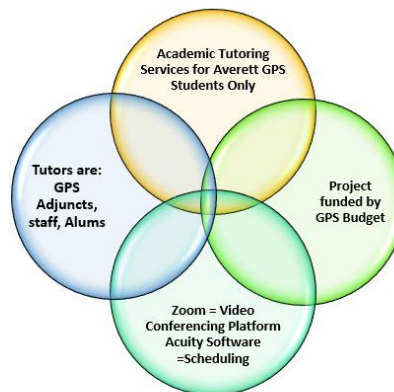
1. Develop a project implementation plan and timeline and successfully execute;
2. Create a solid onboarding process with onboarding manual;
3. Create quarterly professional development opportunities for existing tutors;
4. Increase student support opportunities for online learners at Averett University;
5. Facilitate student connection to Averett University from successful tutoring experiences with Averett's faculty, staff, and alumni;
6. Improve student persistence and retention metrics; and
7. Improve project planning knowledge.

2.2.3 Risks

A major risk in the successful project implementation was the success of Acuity and Zoom software integration into multiple platforms. To mitigate risks, we tested the implementation of the software integration by creating prototypes like tutoring situations. We recruited 10 Averett staff members and asked them to be students who needed additional tutoring help. We then went through test case scenarios and gathered feedback from not only the tutor but the test subjects.

2.3 Definitive Scope Statement

The purpose of this project was to create and implement a new tutoring program for students in Averett University's GPS program. Utilizing the Zoom video conferencing platform paired with Acuity Scheduling Software as the mode of scheduling and employing Averett faculty, staff, and Alumni to tutor will aid in the improvement of student academic success and connection to the University.



3 Deliverables

3.1 To Partnering Organization

Deliverables to Averett University included the following:

1. Implement a solid recruitment and onboarding process by hiring and training the first round of qualified tutors;
2. Implement paid onboarding training for tutors built in Averett's learning management system Canvas;
3. Operationalize tutor onboarding payroll paperwork and timesheet submission;
4. Successfully implement Acuity schedule software allowing students to quickly view real-time tutor availability and self-book their own tutoring appointments;
5. Successfully market synchronous tutoring option to new, existing, and potential students;
6. Include Zoom tutoring options in all onboarding materials mailed and emailed out to new students before the start of their first class;
7. Successfully operationalize ongoing communication of synchronous tutoring options to instructors and students; and
8. Create and operationalize electronic online evaluations to assess tutoring effectiveness.

Deliverable	Due	Appendix
Tutor recruiting plan	Summer 2018	No
Tutor training onboarding program	Fall 2018	No
Operationalize tutoring payroll	Summer 2018	No
Implement software integrated	Summer 2018	No
Marketing plan	Spring 2019	No
Include tutoring options in new student onboarding procedures	Spring 2019	Yes
Ongoing communication to instructors and student of tutoring resource	Spring 2019	Yes
Create and operationalize electronic online student Tutor Satisfaction survey	Spring 2019	Yes

4 Project Approach

4.1 Project Lifecycle Processes

As the Executive DSS at Averett University, I meet weekly with the VP EM and the DSS. Through these weekly meetings, in conjunction with other small group meetings, my consultancy project progressed. I worked most closely with the DSS, and we developed communication and implementation plans. I communicated project progression reports during the monthly enrollment management meeting and monthly required strategic plan updates.

4.2 Project Management Processes

The VP EM, the DSS, and I, as the consultant, oversaw the project management processes. Project plans and ideas were often discussed in our formal meetings, by informal phone conversations, and/or email. Project management updates are performed by me in monthly enrollment management team meetings and strategic plan updates. I created a Gantt chart to manage and monitor implementation progress and control project changes.

4.3 Project Support Processes

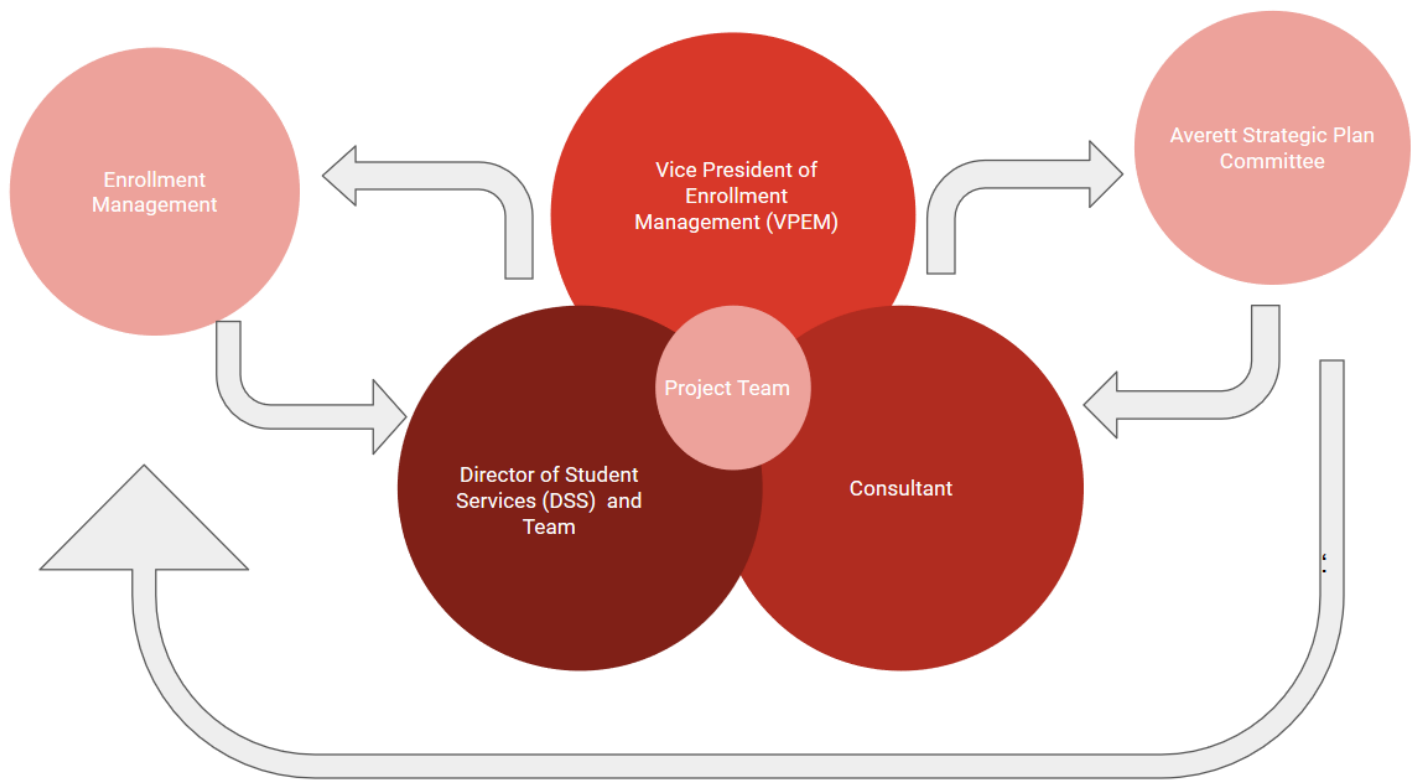
To initiate my consultancy project, I began by organizing a meeting with the online student services teams to assess online student satisfaction surveys from 2017. The student satisfaction surveys concluded a desire for additional student academic support. As the consultant, I then scheduled a meeting with the VP EM and the DSS to propose my asynchronous consultancy project idea. Once both were in support, it was presented to the strategic planning committee members and was accepted as a project under three key areas: student success, academic innovation, and strategic growth. Once the implementation phase of the project began, in conjunction with monthly enrollment management team updates, monthly reports were due to the strategic planning committee and bi-annual report progress presentations were performed (See Appendix C for strategic plan update).

4.4 Organization

4.4.1 Project Team

The project team consisted of the VP EM, DSS, and student success coaches. As the consultant, I worked closely with the VP EM and the DSS. The DSS and I worked side by side the student success coaches through all aspects of the implementation phases.

4.4.2 Mapping Between Averett University and Student



5 Communications Plan

Who-Stakeholder	What info do they need	Why do they need it	When will they get it	How will they get it
Students	What kind of tutoring is available and when and how it is available	So they know they have academic support and succeed	During onboarding phases of enrollment and reminders each term	In onboarding packet, mail outs, conversations with student services, email and text blasts.
Vice President Enrollment Management	How the project is progressing. Forces impacting project successes. What resources are needed?	To adequately provide support for the project	During weekly project updates	One on one weekly meetings, updates at Enrollment management meetings and through strategic plan updates
Student Services team	Specifics of student tutoring resource, how students can schedule appointments, directions on how to schedule tutoring appointments	To assist enrolled students that need academic help. To communicate academic resources to student body	During implementation and quarterly check-ins	During weekly team meetings. In process guides and in email strategic plans updates
Tutors	The expectations for tutoring, pay information, training, general operational pieces	To execute tutoring to the highest degree of excellence	During onboarding training and in on going quarterly training check ins	Through Zoom and email updates
Website manager	Information for website	To post information to website	As updates are needed	Through email
Admissions	What kind of tutoring is available and when and how it is available	Communicate academic support resources in place to incoming student	During implementation and quarterly check-ins	During weekly team meetings. In process guides and in email strategic plans updates

6 Work Plan

6.1 Work Breakdown Structure

2018

March – Project team researched video conferencing platforms and appointment software.

May – Project team presented video conferencing platforms and appointment software options to the enrollment management team. Enrollment management team opted for the Zoom and Acuity software options.

June – Zoom Education plan and Acuity Scheduling software purchased by Executive Director of Student Success.

June - The student services team successfully implemented software integration and an effective scheduling process through the integration of Acuity and Zoom.

July– Student services team successfully tested Acuity and Zoom software integration by creating prototype like tutoring situations and gathered feedback.

August – Executive DSS designed onboarding procedures and training materials housed in Averett’s learning management system.

August – The executive DSS in conjunction with Averett’s human resource department designed job postings for open tutoring positions.

October – Posted job posting on Averett’s website and performed a recruitment campaign for tutors.

December – Hired first group of tutors and conducted training.

December - The student services team created electronic online evaluations to assess effectiveness of the tutor.

2019

January – The student services team successfully marketed zoom tutoring to new and existing students by

- incorporating and educating new students during the new student orientation and onboarding process,
- admissions calls/contact conducted through Zoom, and
- onboarding/welcome calls conducted and scheduled through Acuity and Zoom.

Marketing zoom tutoring to existing students by

- including zoom tutoring resources on faculty syllabus templates,
- Student Success team notifying instructors by email 2 weeks before the start of class informing them of the tutoring resources available to them and asking that they promote with their students during the course,
- building a Student Success Resource folder in LMS and housing Zoom tutoring resources; uploading the Student Success Resource folder in new and existing student LMS shells/blueprints, and
- Creating a landing page at gps.averett.edu/tutoring.

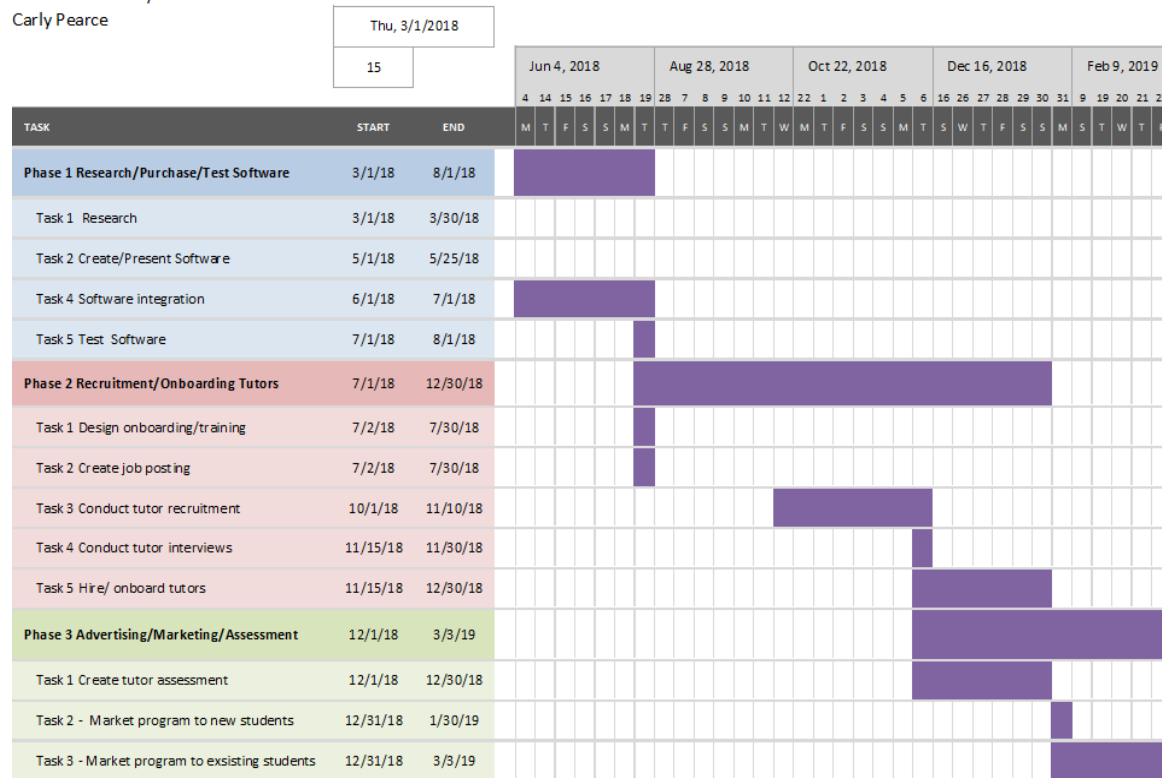
February – Work with the third party marketing firm to market on social media platforms and in promotional recruitment materials.

6.2 Resources

1. Zoom Education Plan Subscription – Additional Zoom Pro licenses and Zoom dashboard reporting features.
2. Additional Zoom Cloud space – All tutoring sessions are automatically recorded and sent to the student through an URL link to the cloud recording. For this, additional cloud space was purchased.
3. Acuity Scheduling Calendar Software – New appointments booked through Acuity automatically create new meetings in Zoom. The software allows for students to schedule and reschedule appointments online and will update the existing meetings in Zoom. Student can additionally edit existing appointments. The Acuity scheduling software will automatically set the location for calendar events with the Zoom meeting details. This will allow for a seamless student experience, and the appointments within zoom invitation will be sent to the student and tutor through email, calendar syncing, and text message reminders.
4. Electronic tutor evaluations to allow the students to evaluate the tutoring service. This survey will be sent post tutoring session automatically through the Acuity scheduling software.

Zoom Tutoring Project

Averett University GPS
Carly Pearce



7 Milestones

Project Milestones

Milestone	Title	Forecast Date
1	Implement software integrated	June 2018
2	Tutor recruiting plan	July 2018
3	Operationalize tutoring payroll	July 2018
4	Tutor training onboarding program	November 2018
5	Marketing plan	January 2019
6	Include tutoring options in new student onboarding procedures	January 2019
7	Ongoing communication to instructors and student of tutoring resource	January 2019
8	Create and operationalize electronic online student Tutor Satisfaction survey	December 2018

8 Metrics and Results

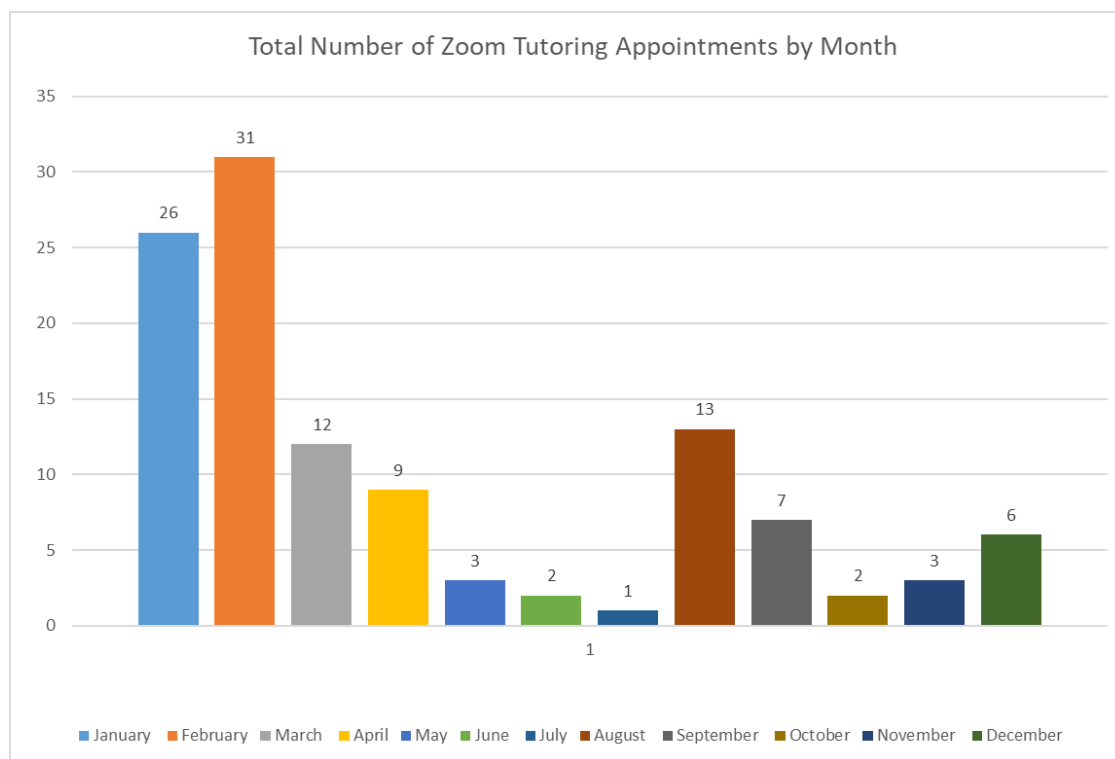
Performance requirements for this project were to create and implement a new tutoring program for students in Averett University's GPS program that would aid in the improvement of student academic success and connection to the University.

Three forms of assessment were put in place to evaluate the overall satisfaction and success of the tutoring program:

1. Number of tutoring appointments in 2019,
2. Post tutoring student satisfaction surveys, and
3. A quantitative data analysis of grade outcomes of students who did and did not receive tutoring in four sections of BSA554 taught by the same instructor in 2019

Total Number of Tutoring Appointment in 2019

In 2019, a total of 99 individual students received tutoring help totaling 115 separate tutoring appointments. These usage metrics were reported out to the academic program directors and the student services teams.



Post Tutoring Student Satisfaction Surveys

A total of 43 electronic post student satisfaction surveys were completed during January 2019 through December 2019. The following results from the post satisfaction survey were collected:

- 83.72% strongly agreed that the tutoring sessions helped improve understanding of course content
- 88.37% found great deal of value in the tutoring sessions
- 88.37% rated their experience with the GPS tutor as excellent

Field summary for A1(A1)

Tutoring sessions helped to improve my understanding of my course content []

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly Agree (A1)	36	83.72%
Agree (A2)	6	13.95%
Neither (A5)	0	0.00%
Disagree (A3)	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree (A4)	0	0.00%
No answer	1	2.33%

Field summary for A2(A1)

I find a great deal of value in tutoring sessions []

Answer	Count	Percentage
Strongly Agree (A1)	38	88.37%
Agree (A2)	5	11.63%
Neither (A5)	0	0.00%
Disagree (A3)	0	0.00%
Strongly Disagree (A4)	0	0.00%
No answer	0	0.00%

Field summary for A3(A1)

Rate your experience with the GPS tutor []

Answer	Count	Percentage
Excellent (A1)	38	88.37%
Good (A2)	4	9.30%
Average (A5)	0	0.00%
Poor (A3)	1	2.33%
No answer	0	0.00%

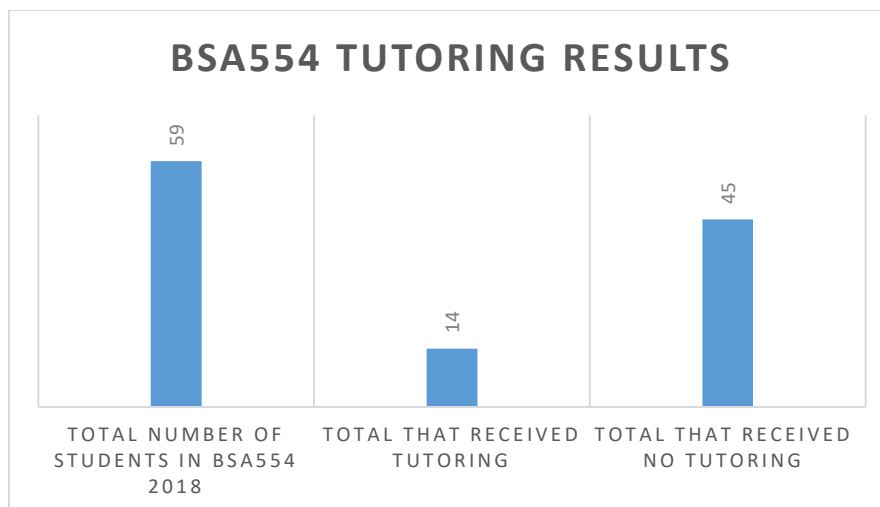
Quantitative data analysis of grade outcomes for four sections of BSA554 taught by the same instructor in 2019.

In 2019, Averett University offered BSA554– Comprehensive Financial Management four times. Each time, it was taught by the same instructor in an online asynchronous format. There were a total of 58 students who took BSA554. Each of the students was given points based on the 4.0 grade point scale. Mean grades were then tallied for students who did and did not receive tutoring, and an independent t test was performed to ascertain if there was a significant difference in grades in a positive direction between those who received tutoring and those who did not.

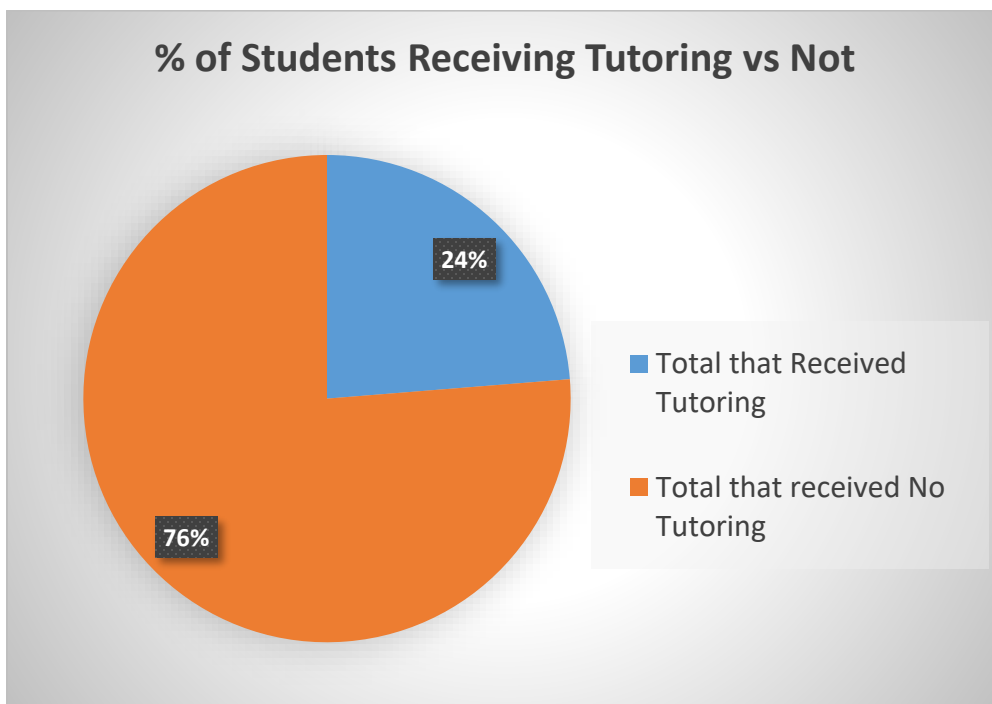
The following results were assembled from the quantitative analysis:

- Of a total of 58 students who took BSA554 online in 2018 at Averett University, 45 students (76%) did not receive tutoring compared to 14 students (24%) who did.
- 42% of students who received tutoring made a grade of A, compared to 22% of students who did not.
- The average grade for students who received tutoring was 3.28 (SD = 0.726) compared to 2.66 (SD = 1.1078) who did not.
- My hypothesis was that students who received tutoring would have a higher average grade for BSA554 than those who did not. A one tailed t test for independent measures was performed and showed a significant difference that would suggest that the null cannot be accepted.
- The obtained t value of 1.95 exceeded the critical value of 1.67 which concludes that tutoring did have a significant impact on success in the course, because the probability of the results being caused due to chance is less than 2.7%. $t(57) = 1.95, p < .05$.

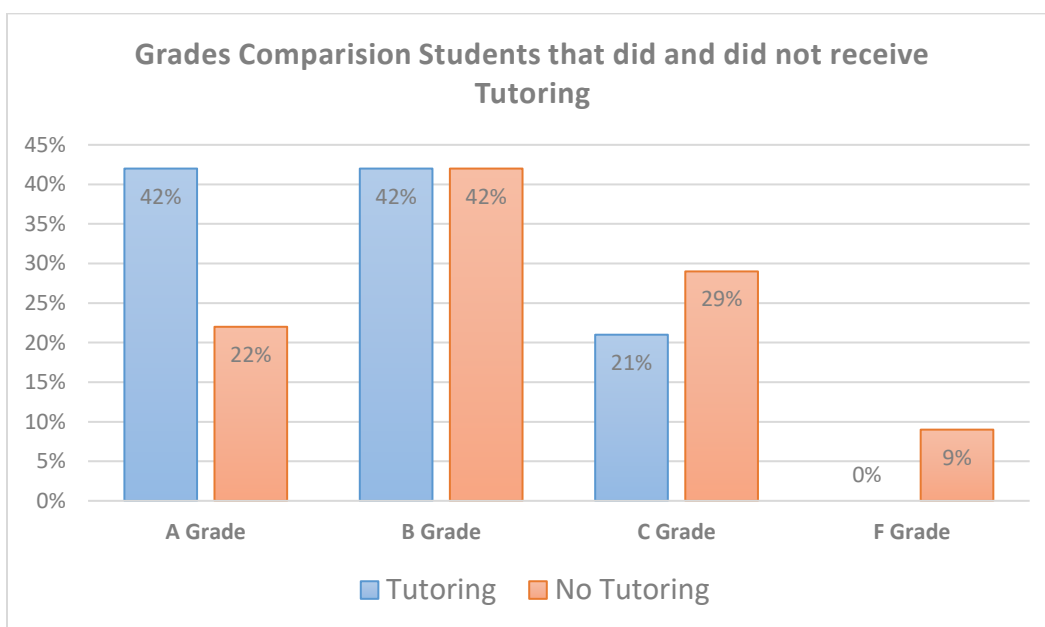
Students in BSA 554 in 2018 Who Did and Did Not Receive Tutoring



Percentage of Students Receiving Tutoring Versus Not



Comparison Graph to Show % of Students Who Made A, B, C, and F Grades in BSA 554 Who Did and Did Not Receive Tutoring



9 Risks, Constraints, Assumptions

9.1 Risks

Risk	Impact on Project	Causes	Likelihood	Action
Budget Cut to Tutoring Program	Project Ending and/or Debilitating	Poor Student Enrollment	Low	Continue to Report success outcome data with leadership so cutting budget is NOT an option because they see the value added from student success results.
Tutoring equipment and Software Malfunctions	Impact day to day tutoring program operations and overall student experience while utilizing service	Software updates, User error, Software errors	Low	Continue to perform quarterly Zoom and Acuity appointment software training sessions for tutors and students. Documents and train contingency plans for when software malfunctions. Have help on hand for when issue arise
Availability of tutors and not having tutors on hand when student tutoring needs arise	Unable to support student tutoring needs. Negative Impacts on student success. Project Debilitating	High volume of tutoring needs at one time. Tutors quitting. Not onboarding enough tutors to accommodate high need periods for certain subjects.	Medium	Hire a part-time Graduate assistant to run zoom tutoring program daily operations to ensure current tutors remain engaged, manage the day to day operations of the program, continually assess outcomes, monitor and report student feedback and onboard new tutors
Capacity Issues of current Graduate Assistant managing tutoring program daily operations	Impact day-to-day operations of the tutoring program and overall student success	Current graduate assistant has other duties and the projects positive momentum and the higher than expected student usage could cause capacity and operational issues	Medium	Look at ways to funnel off some of his other responsibilities to other areas to allow him the time needed to operationalize and run program. Add the project to 2025 strategic plan and lobby to for a full-time position by sharing student usage and success data.

Project infancy - insufficient procedural documentation and the potential for employees leave the institution or position	Project Debilitating	Vulnerable and key knowledge lost due to lack of documentation that could be used to train the successor. operations	Medium/High	Mandatory Documentation of procedures as the program grows that is housed on a shared drive and cross trained throughout department
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9.2 Constraints

The project functioned with no major constraints. During high surge periods that occurred outside the scope of this project, slight constraints occurred due to my ability to fully focus on the project.

9.3 Assumptions

The following assumptions were made during the project:

- Averett University's GPS program would continue to enroll and graduate students.
- The project will stay within budget.
- Software costs will remain affordable and continue to work well for the project.
- GPS students will utilize tutoring services.
- Student satisfaction survey responses will improve in the areas of community/connectivity and student support services.

10 Financial Plan

The Zoom tutoring project operated on a well-established student services budget.

The total budget for Averett's GPS student services department is \$68,600 per year.

The Executive DSS oversees the Averett GPS budget. Averett uses a zero-based budgeting structure and budget requests for following fiscal year are due by April 1 in the previous budget year.

TUTORING COSTS BY PROGRAM			
	Budgetted Tutoring Hours by program	Tutor Cost Per Hour	Budget FY 2019/2020
Business Program	800	\$15	\$12,000
Education Program	230	\$15	\$5,000
Criminal Justice Program	100	\$15	\$3,000
			\$20,000
SOFTWARE YEARLY SUBSCRIPTIONS			
			Budget FY 2019/2020
Zoom Education Plan - With Cloud space			\$8,000
Acuity Scheduling Software			\$600
Lime Survey Software			\$0
P/T Tutoring Coordinator			\$20,000
3rd Party Tutoring "NetTutor"			\$20,000
			\$48,600
			Total Budget FY2019/2020
		TOTAL	\$68,600


11 Quality Assurance Plan

The quality assurance plan is based around five core principles:

1. Observe
2. Plan
3. Do
4. Check
5. Action

Institutions of higher education that desire to thrive in the future must remain 100% student centered and have market driven student resources. This Zoom tutoring consultancy project recognized the need to continually update learning opportunities and technologies for its students. Through the assessment, institutions can embrace technological advancements and provide relevant and current educational opportunities through an assortment of affordable and accessible learning technologies.



Quality Assurance Plan		
 Observe	Plan and Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement software integrated • Tutor recruiting plan • Operationalize tutoring payroll • Tutor training onboarding program • Marketing plan • Include tutoring options in new student onboarding procedures • Ongoing communication to instructors and student of tutoring resource • Create and operationalize electronic online student Tutor Satisfaction survey
	Check	<p>Formal assessment were put in place to evaluate the overall satisfaction and success of the tutoring program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of tutoring appointments in 2019 • Post tutoring student satisfaction surveys • A quantitative data analysis of grade outcomes in 4 sections of BSA554 taught by the same instructor in 2019 <p>Informal assessment were performed through conversations with students, faculty and staff</p>
	Act	<p>Changes that have occurred in January 2019 – December 2019</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with Averett’s marketing department to brand and improved marketing materials for new and existing students • Presented zoom tutoring options at campus wide faculty meeting <p>Changes for this year</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an assessment to measure tutor’s experience and gain feedback • Include zoom tutoring program options on academic probation letters

Appendix A

Post Tutoring Student Satisfaction Survey

GPS - Tutoring Service Survey
This survey is intended to collect feedback from participants

0% 100%

GPS Tutoring Service
 We appreciate your time

• Please include the name of your tutor and the course you received tutoring in

Tutoring sessions helped to improve my understanding of my course content

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No answer
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

I find a great deal of value in tutoring sessions

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No answer
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Rate your experience with the GPS tutor

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	No answer
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Additional comments

Appendix B

Student Appointment Page View and Link

<https://AverettGPSScheduling.as.me/academicsupport>

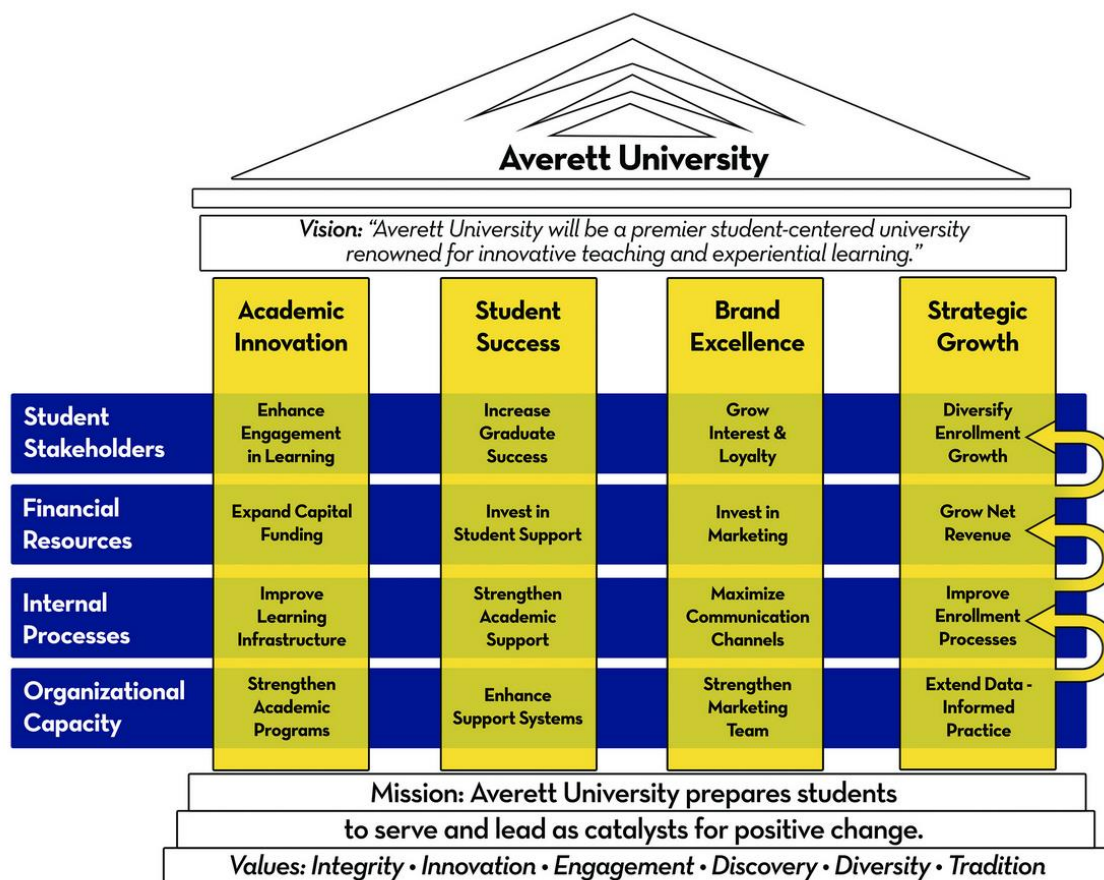


Choose Appointment Type	Your Info	Confirmation
<p>Choose a category...</p> <p>Academic Support</p>		
<p>I would like to schedule...</p>		
<p>Traditional - Registration (30 minutes)</p>		
<p>Tutoring (1 hour)</p>		
<p>Writing Support (1 hour)</p> <p>Schedule a live meeting to go over any written assignment or component of that assignment such as MLA/APA formatting, grammar, etc.</p>		
<p>Meet a Faculty Member (20 minutes)</p> <p>What better way to learn about our programs than to talk to one of Averett's highly qualified professors and let them give you a first-hand account of what to expect.</p>		

(GMT-4:00) Eastern Time [change](#)

Appendix C

Averett's Strategic Plan for 2014-2020



Appendix D

Literature Review

Averett University is a small 4-year private liberal arts institution located in Danville, Virginia. Averett's Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS) program is the nontraditional arm of the institution and has offered continuing education options for the nontraditional adult learner for over 30 years. Soon to be renamed "Averett Online," Averett's GPS program is now fully conducted in an asynchronous online format. Only 7 years ago, Averett's GPS programs were held face to face in physical classroom spaces that were distributed throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. Averett's GPS program's sudden shift in format from face to face to that of asynchronous online was due to Averett's need to stay competitive in the adult market arena. Asynchronous online learning environments provide adult students with flexible, self-guided, and affordable learning opportunities. However, this sudden shift in format did not come without a lot of hard decisions – downsizing and continued unforeseen challenges – that must be assessed and addressed.

Face-to-face learning environments with standardized and rigid learning timeslots naturally allow students to manage their time more effectively by giving them scheduled, focused, and uninterrupted learning opportunities in physical classroom settings. They also provide a natural environment for students to connect with each other, the institution, and its faculty and staff. These very connections promote student persistence and success. Asynchronous online learning allows students the flexibility to complete their coursework anywhere and on their own time but poses challenges when it comes to time management, connection, and student persistence.

The goal of my literature review was to study internal and external dynamics that may affect persistence rates of the adult learner in online and/or distance education programs. The five articles discussed below will include information around three common themes that emerged when compiling information associated with adult erosion in online and distance education programs. First, do students with poor time management skills persist at lower rates in distance education programs? Second, do institutions with insufficient online student support services have lower graduation and persistence rates than others that have sufficient online student support services? Third, do students who make successful connections in their first year persist at a higher rate than those who do not in distance education programs?

Poor Time Management

Adult students experience unique internal and external challenges compared to their traditional student counterparts. Nontraditional students with ineffective time management skills seem to have higher dropout rates than those who have mastered this skill. Wlodkowski et al. (2002) studied nontraditional student retention concerns by researching both students in an adult accelerated program and a traditional program. The survey was given to students who decided to leave the institution and

gathered information about two sets of variables; 1) those within students' domain of control, such as academic performance, employment, financial status, and personal circumstances; and 2) those under institutional control, such as instruction, student services, career assistance, and school environment.

(Wlodkowski et al., 2002, p. 5)

The findings determined that students from both programs indicated that time

constraints were a key indicator as to why students opted to drop out. It was suggested by researchers that both programs extend courses and allow for weekend course scheduling and assignment submission. The basic premise behind this recommendation is that allowing adults the flexibility to maintain family responsibilities and their work requirements will result in higher levels of student persistence rates.

Nash (2005) surveyed Coastline Community College students who dropped out or withdrew from a failing course. A “total of 478 students filled out and returned a survey questionnaire. The voluntary respondents represented 14.7% of the sample and 4.7% of the population” (Nash, 2005, p. 5). The survey included multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question that permitted students to elaborate or comment further. The results from the questionnaire indicated that students felt that time management was a challenge in the course, and it was concluded that students who were able to manage their time effectively persisted at a higher rate. The researcher suggested the enactment of cost-effective student support strategies coinciding with solid onboarding practices could potentially impact student persistence in a positive way (Nash, 2005).

Both researchers referenced student time constraints as leading causes for students dropping out or failing courses. Although time management is a skill set that can be arguably self-taught, it is widely believed that universities that build courses with well-thought-out strategies to combat adult time management constraints will see an increase in student persistence. Transparency of course workload and time commitments preceding enrollment paired with flexibility within the format of the program seem to be two very significant preliminary focal points for predicting student persistence.

Student Services

Institutional support is the second theme in predicting successful student persistence. Park and Jun (2009) surveyed 147 students who had institutionally withdrawn or had not completed an online course in which they were previously enrolled. Their research proposed that students are prone to withdrawing from an online program when they believe the institution in which they are enrolled does not care about their student success.

Aarreniemi-Jokipielto and Back (2014) conducted and examined 39 telephone interviews with adult students who dropped out of a course. The researcher's interviews showed similar themes around time management challenges, work, and balancing family obligations. The research highlighted that numerous students did not know if they were assigned a guidance counselor or point person in their online program. As the student workload increases in difficulty and intensity, it is paramount that academic support is given to students on a more individualized basis.

Wlodkowski et al. (2002) also concluded that not only was time management a cause for higher rates of student withdrawals but also the quality of student advising and the level of high impact teaching and peer interaction practices. These key components are all considered student support services and can be tweaked to encourage high impact participation and persistence practices. Wlodkowski et al. recommended for improved student support services that peer-support programs and access to more simplistic, dependable, and understandable advising practices are key to effective student support strategies. Student support opportunities need to be easy to use and available on a reliable and dependable basis for all students.

Undeniably, students require and are requesting support in their academic studies. This support not only encompasses faculty and counselor support at the university but also from their fellow students and family members. For universities to successfully improve their online adult student persistence rates, it is imperative that they intentionally create holistic interactions and build a student support structure for each student.

First-Year Persistence

Research has shown that the student's first-year experience is a key performance indicator related to student success and persistence. Yuen et al. (2011) performed a sequence of research interviews and surveyed freshmen who had not persisted after the conclusion of their first semester. The study found that providing additional student support to first-year students who are struggling with failing grades increases their chances of persisting the following year by 50%. Key strategies mentioned that aided in the successful retention of first-year students were developing time management and effective learning skills, additional tutoring support, and a robust early alert system for at-risk students (Yuen et al., 2011). The addition of an early alert system to remind and provide additional support services to students of future assignments or due dates could be tremendously helpful for those students struggling to adapt to their additional workload associated with their education.

Chyung et al. (1998) researched in the form of qualitative interviews with students attending Boise State University's distance education program. Researchers determined that student satisfaction, especially in the first few courses of their first year, was a key reason for determining whether they were to continue or not. Chyung et al. concluded the following:

The student interviews revealed more detailed information about the root causes of their dissatisfaction with the learning environment. During the first or second course, they were overwhelmed by advanced knowledge and overloaded information. They perceived themselves as learners with low confidence levels.

(p. 3)

Thus, with these findings, the university came up with a strategic plan that decreased withdrawal rates by 22%, by ensuring adequate student support services that reinforced student persistence. The first year of distance learning can be challenging for an adult learner. Without transparent and consistent student onboarding practices, some assume online education to be equivalent to that of a face-to-face campus education, which is an incorrect assumption. Ensuring new online adult students feel supported and confident during their first year, especially in their first course, is critical because this is when a student decides if they can successfully navigate in the world of online distance education.

Conclusion

Research that can explain why adult learners drop out needs to continue. It is evident from the research presented in my literature review that reoccurring themes continue to emerge. Institutions that take a holistic approach to student services, transparently and simplistically, should see higher persistence rates from their online learners; especially those institutions with solid onboarding and first-year retention practices which focus on personalized education and life skills, all while supporting and valuing the student experience in and out of the online environment. Ultimately, institutions that invest in structures and systems that monitor, assess, and ensure students

have access to resources that provide them with the skills to be self-sufficient learners
should see higher levels of persistence and graduation rates.

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