HAT Project

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ELFH 671 - Performance Interventions

Introduction

Resources for Academic Achievement (REACH) was created in 2000 as an initiative to help undergraduate students. According to the REACH website the mission of REACH is to assist the diverse undergraduate student population at the University of Louisville (UofL) to reach their individual academic goals. REACH began as a unit organized under the Academic Provost's Office. The initial offerings by REACH included: onsite support for developmental mathematics and reading courses for any enrolled UofL student with mathematics or reading deficiencies; a math lab for drop-in support for developmental math classes offered by a joint partnership with the local community college; and advising for all students enrolled in the continuing studies program and those that were undecided; and the Learning Resources Center. Since 2000, REACH has greatly changed and its development has been the result of the university's focus on strengthening the academic support for all undergraduate students.

Today, REACH is the home of multiple academic support services and retention programs. The following services are offered to all undergraduate students: the Math Resource Center (MRC), the Virtual Math Center (VMC), the Computer Resource Centers in Ekstrom Library and MITC, the Delphi Digital Media Suite, and tutoring in the Learning Resource Center (LRC) (both onsite and online).

REACH initially started offering online tutoring during the fall 2011 semester. Online tutoring consisted of students enrolled in selected distance-only

courses. These students were added to an LRC Blackboard organization in fall 2011 and were provided with course resources. Starting spring 2012 students were offered a true online tutoring option using Join.me for synchronous tutoring sessions. The following distance course sections were selected for fall 2011: Spanish 121-53 and 122-50; Philosophy 311-5; Sociology 329-50. The following distance course sections were selected for spring 2012: Chemistry 101-50 and 201-50, Spanish 121-50, 122-50/53, and 123-50, History 101-50. Spring 2012 Since Fall 2012, REACH has been using Blackboard Collaborate to offer online synchronous tutoring to any student who wishes to participate in select tutoring sessions based on select courses.

Stated Business Problem

With the online tutoring program being fairly new at REACH, the coordinator for the Learning Resource Center (LRC) has asked for a review of current operations to see if and what changes can be made to improve the service. The LRC coordinator stated that she felt as though the online tutoring program is not quite as strong as the face-to-face tutoring offered by REACH. Data from the spring 2012 semester indicated that the percentage of online students passing the course they were being tutored in was 68.6 percent. The percentage of onsite students passing the course they were being tutored in was 72 percent. The desired pass rate for students using REACH services is 70 percent. The onsite students are meeting the desired rate, while the online students are slightly below the desired rate.

Working with the LRC coordinator and the Executive Director of REACH we examined and discussed several issues that affect the strength of the online tutoring program using the analysis of performance framework. We identified gaps in performance at the organizational, process, and individual level. The identified gap in the organizational level relates to what courses students can take online. UofL does not offer online education for all general education courses. According to the Executive Director, the desired state would be that for every course offered onsite UofL would offer an equivalent online. The process performance gap is primarily found in the department. REACH does not have the ability at this point to offer tutoring online to every course offered onsite. The desired goal for REACH would be to offer an online tutoring session for each course for which on site tutoring is offered. The individual performance gap deals with the technology related issues that are affecting the tutors and tutees with the ability to use online tutoring service. The desired performance level for individuals according to the LRC coordinator is that there would be no technology issues with the online tutoring and if there were any the tutors would be able to solve those problems. The LRC coordinator and myself decided to focus our time and effort on the worker performance gap. As this is a new program that is growing, we felt that the time and effort put into working with the individual level would be more beneficial than working with the organizational or process levels.

Scope of the Project

This project will entail a systematic review of the Online Tutoring Program at the University of Louisville. The Online Tutoring Program (OTP) is a subset of

the LRC in REACH. This project will require cooperation from the Executive

Director of REACH, the LRC coordinator, the graduate assistant for the OTP, the

tutors in the OTP, and students participating in the OTP. Our timetable for

completion is listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Project Timeline	
October 3, 2012	Email and request an interview with the tutors and tutees selected by the LRC coordinator.
October 23-26, 2012	Watch and observe online tutoring sessions
October 31, 2012	Complete interviews with online tutors and tutees
November 1, 2012	Compile a list of the top technology related issues faced by the tutors and tutees.
November 3, 2012	Complete and send out survey to tutors and tutees participating in online tutoring. Request that these be completed by November 8.
November 9-14, 2012	Develop interventions to address the issues.
November 16, 2012	Present the interventions to the LRC coordinator and Executive Director of REACH for their implementation. Based on conversations with them the interventions would be applied starting Spring 2012 with the new tutoring cycle.

The coordinator for the LRC (Client) and the consultant agreed to the

following items at the start of the project. We agreed that the project would entail

a review of the online tutoring program at UofL. The client agreed to give the

consultant access to the online tutors, tutees, graduate student assistant (GSA),

and the LRC coordinator. In order to not disturb the academic process at

REACH, the consultant agreed to interview tutors, tutees, GSA, and LRC

coordinator in a manner that will not to disrupt the academic work of REACH.

The client and consultant agreed to have the project completed by November 16,

2012. The consultant will recommend interventions to the client and the client will

implement the solutions during the spring 2013 and fall 2013 semesters.

Data Collection

The method for conducting this study was a mixture of interviews and observations. The interviews were unstructured. According to Brewerton & Millward (2001), "unstructured interviews allow the researcher carte blanche to address any or all of the a given number of topics which may be of interest to the research. Questions and their order are not fixed and are allowed to evolve during the interview process" (pg. 70). The interviews will consist of 12 initial questions for the tutors and 11 initial questions for the tutees. With both groups we asked follow up questions to dig deeper at the issues the students were facing with online tutoring. The second form of research we conducted was observations. REACH records all online tutoring sessions with the Blackboard Collaborate software. Recorded sessions are archived for review by the coordinator and other staff members.

The questions for the tutor interviews were:
- Describe your role in the tutoring program?
- Do you only tutor online?
- Describe the online tutoring process?
- Describe a success you have had with online tutoring?
- What problems or issues have you had with online tutoring?
- How many of those problems would you say are technology related?
- Of those problems which one do you see most often?
- Do you feel that you have adequate resources for online tutoring?
- Did you receive adequate training for online tutoring techniques?
- Are students prepared for online tutoring?
- What makes on-site tutoring more successful than online tutoring?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the online tutoring program?

The questions for the tutee interviews were:
- Describe your role in the tutoring program?
- Do you only participate in online tutoring?

- Describe the online tutoring process?
- Describe a success you have had with online tutoring?
- What problems or issues have you had with online tutoring?
- How many of those problems would you say are technology related?
- Of those problems which one do you see most often?
- Do you feel that your tutor has adequate resources for online tutoring?
- Did you receive adequate training for using the online tutoring platform?
- What makes on-site tutoring more successful than online tutoring?
- What recommendations do you have for improving the online tutoring program?

The group of subjects chosen for this study was the tutors and tutees that either tutor or participate in the online tutoring program. The LRC coordinator provided the list of names of student signed up for online tutoring. Those students were contacted to set up individual interviews. Students were scheduled for 20-30 minute interviews. All interviews were recorded, with the permission of the students being interviewed. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed into computer files. Care was taken to assure the students that they will not be identified in any subsequent reporting of the data. We were purposeful in how we do our observations. In order to get a good picture of the issues faced with the online tutoring program we observed those sessions that we did have a chance to speak to the tutor or tutee about. We looked for any audio, connectivity, and the Collaborate issues.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read and coded into different issues. The issues were lumped into different concepts. These concepts were placed into different categories. These

categories were then used to generate hypothesis on why there is a particular problem. The same type of analysis was used for the observations.

Upon the completion of the interviews and observations, the following themes emerged as issues related to the Online Tutoring Program. Some of these issues are technology related and some are not.

Issue 1. The number one issue that both tutors and tutees mentioned is the failure of either the tutor or the tutee to use a microphone for voice features in Collaborate.

Issue 2. The second most common issue was confusion about how to access the session or with what they are supposed to do either in the tutoring session. This was more the tutor than the tutee. One tutor mentioned that she was confused in regards to whether she needed to send out the link to the online tutoring session to the tutee. A second tutor was confused on how to access the Collaborate room. Information was sent to the tutee and the GSA in charge of creating the room, but not the tutor. One tutee mentioned that she has a hard time finding the link to the Collaborate room and the tutor had to send the link to the student.

Issue 3. The third most common issue was the lack of training for both the tutor and tutee in regards to how to best use Collaborate. Both tutor and tutee mentioned that they felt they needed more training in how to use Collaborate.

Issue 4. The fourth most common issue was tutee no shows. Many tutors stated they had tutees simply did not show up for the online tutoring session.

Issue 5. The final issue discovered through the interviews and the observations was that the tutors believed most of the students who participated in the online tutoring program where not as prepared for the session as students who participated in the onsite tutoring.

Interventions

In order to improve the online tutoring services of REACH, interventions were developed to address the issues found in the interviews.

Intervention 1. The first intervention is designed to address the issue of microphones and confusion of both the tutor and tutees with the process. I suggest that REACH redesign their website to include an area about the online tutoring program. The website should include information about the online tutoring process, best microphone to use and where to buy them, frequently asked questions (FAQ) about the online tutoring process, and a checklist for setting up computers for online tutoring. The LRC should develop a list of the most frequently asked questions based on the common questions they have been asked. They will also need to investigate the different types of common microphones that students may use. This intervention should be fairly easy for REACH to implement and should be low cost. Based on discussions with the Executive Director throughout the project, REACH is planning a redesign of their website in the coming months. The estimated completion for this intervention should be the beginning of the fall 2013 semester.

Intervention 2. The second intervention is designed to address issues one, two, three and five. REACH should develop video tutorials for tutors and tutees.

The tutorials should include basic information about setting up audio and video using the audio/video setup wizard. The videos should also demonstrate some of the more popular functions of Collaborate such as the whiteboard, raise hand, and screen share features. As with the first intervention, this intervention should have fairly low costs and be easy to implement. REACH could use their own Digital Media Suite staff and resources to create the video tutorials. The expected date of implementation for Intervention 2 will be the beginning of the fall 2013 semester.

Intervention 3. Issues two and three will be addressed with Intervention 3. This intervention will entail creating an online tutoring manual for the online tutors. This intervention has been under development during the fall 2012 semester. The issues discovered through the interviews and observations have provided more topics for the online tutoring manual. Topics will include online tutoring pedagogy, Collaborate setup, and frequently added questions. The manual has been posted to the Online Tutor Training Blackboard module. However, it is suggested that REACH urge the online tutors to review the manual during the annual spring 2013 tutor training sessions.

Intervention 4. The last intervention addresses issues two and three. This intervention will primarily deal with training. While it is not customary for performance intervention strategies to suggest training, this intervention suggests a change to the way REACH trains its online tutors. Several of the tutors interviewed for this project indicated that they either did not know how to use Collaborate or that they had never had an online course before. Our suggestion

is that the Learning Resource Center should conduct special training sessions for all online tutors using Collaborate. There would not be any cost to developing new training materials, as the materials could be adopted from the onsite training materials. This intervention can easily be implemented starting during the spring 2013 tutor training.

Issue 4 was not addressed by the interventions presented here. My belief is that through the successful completion of interventions presented here the tutee no shows will decrease. During the interviews, the tutors stated that they felt students did not show up due to technology issues.

Outcomes

The measurement of the interventions presented here will take place either at the end of the spring 2013 or fall 2013 semesters based upon the semester of implementation. REACH can look at the pass rate for the online students to see if the numbers for those semesters have improved from the baseline percentages found after the spring 2012 semester.

References

Brewerton, P. & Millward, L.(2001). *Organizational Research Methods*. London,

    GB: SAGE.