

Chapter 3.24

21st Century E-Student Services

Gary R. Langer

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, USA

STUDENT SERVICES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Developments in information technology and distance learning are revolutionizing the way post-secondary education is organized and delivered in the United States and the world. Higher education is undergoing a fundamental transformation. How higher education transforms in the early years of the 21st century will set the context for the extent to which higher education as an institution will continue to serve as the primary deliverer of educational content, certificates, and degrees. A critical element in this knowledge transfer is the depth and breadth of online student services support. This article will explore the design and development of such services in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System¹ (www.mnscu.edu).

In this Knowledge Age, citizens can learn every day—anytime and anywhere. In addition to a growing student population that is not only becoming older and increasingly diverse, there is a rapid rise of a digital generation (Tapscott, 1998) that expects

and demands that this learning be interactive, collaborative, distributed, and lifelong. To meet the changing needs of students and the changing nature of work and careers in the 21st century (Howell, 2003), colleges and universities need to develop and design not only appropriate emerging curriculum, but also on-demand interaction and online services (Kassop, 2003). It is not only the distance education or technology-savvy students who expect, need, and use such services, but also commuter and dormitory students. It is not about distance, but the amount of technology involved, where the learning starts, and how services are structured. Some of the characteristics of these new, digital learners are:

- Older than “average” undergraduate
- Place bound
- Broad set of responsibilities/roles
- Working in a career field
- Limited time to devote to studies
- Emerging multi-mode student
- Technology savvy
- Accustomed to service on demand

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- Expect choice and convenience
- Become the ‘hardy’ learner of the future (Milliron, 2001)

Online student services connect students to the institution, to the faculty, and to other students on their schedule and needs. But are all students the same, with the same needs?

Learner Segments

There is more than one learner type. Through research conducted for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, seven different learner segments have been identified (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2001).

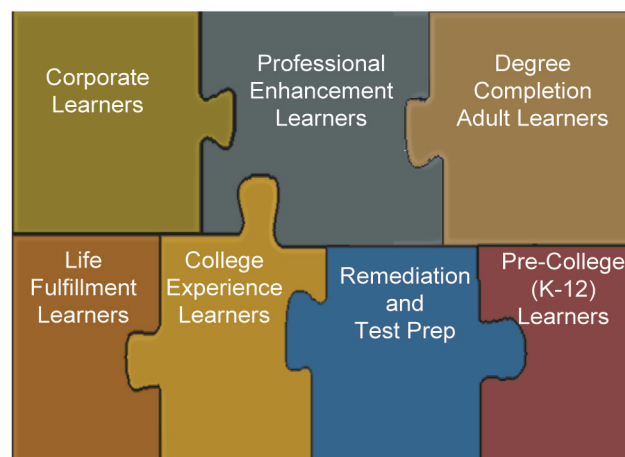
1. Corporate Learners—individuals employed in a corporate setting and seeking education to advance their careers
2. Professional Enhancement Learners—individuals seeking to advance or shift their careers
3. Degree Completion Learners—individuals seeking to complete a degree, typically older students also employed full time
4. Life Fulfillment Learners—individuals interested in education for its own sake

5. College Experience Learners—typically the traditional 18- to 24-year-old residential college student
6. Remediation and Test Preparation Learners—individuals interested in learning as a prerequisite for an examination or entrance to an educational program
7. Pre-College (K-12) Learners—individuals interested in taking post-secondary work prior to completion of high school (Figure 1)

Online, interactive services will need to be provided to each segment in an individualized and content-specific way. Current portal developments (St. Sauver, 2004) provide the customization and personal content and services all learners in this digital age expect.

A higher education e-learning system must leverage the best content created and establish a seamless gateway so that learners can access the content from any number of entry points. In the digital age, with e-learners taking control of their learning process, these relationships are simply indispensable. As these “hardy” e-learners (Milliron, 2001) control and manage more of their own information and knowledge, educational institutions must help learners do so actively and responsibly.

Figure 1. Seven learner segments



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