



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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HELP IS AT HAND!

Accurate and thoughtful communication, delivered quickly and efficiently, is often difficult when the expectation does not allow for a delay in response time. Like many institutions, Shelton State Community College has worked to improve how we respond to the needs of our students as they attempt to navigate the sometimes complex process of enrolling in college. Each semester, representatives from different areas of the college, including students, review our registration process and explore ideas that may improve the student experience and reduce anxiety caused by tackling new challenges. These ideas, coupled with best practices from research, help Shelton State respond to students in an efficient, caring, and cost-effective manner.

FAQ

In the review sessions, it became evident that many of our personnel were receiving forwarded phone calls that included questions that could be easily answered by others without having to be passed. It also became evident there was no mechanism for collecting and communicating those easy answers. Accordingly, we asked a wide variety of offices and departments to submit a list of questions they routinely answer. A team of representatives from the represented areas reviewed, organized, and edited the questions and answers so they could be easily understood and accessed. The result was a Frequently Asked Questions document that was posted on the college's website. Not only is it continually updated, the answers are accessible to anyone looking for answers to quick questions. Certainly our tech-savvy students have been able to go online to find answers to their questions, but an unforeseen benefit is that the FAQ helps educate our employees about policies and services in different areas of the institution.

Telephone Help Line

While the FAQ has been a wonderful asset for those who need a quick answer to a pressing question, some still need the benefit of human interaction. To accommodate those who want to talk to a "real person" instead of surfing the web, a telephone Help Line was created as an additional resource for students. The Help Line number is publicized on the web and around the

college. While we certainly answer the phones in all our offices in the same way any organization is likely to do, we created the Help Line as a focused effort to respond to those who have questions that might not readily be serviced by other departments. A staff member, equipped with a departmental contact list and access to the FAQ document, answers calls during regular business hours. In most cases, the Help Line attendant can assist the caller immediately. However, in the event the answer is not readily known, the attendant researches the answer and contacts the caller with the information he or she needed. After the new process launched, we decided to cross-train the Help Line attendant, along with the college's regular switchboard operator, the Information Desk staff, and the Special Projects coordinator. The individuals serving in each of the roles became an Information Distribution team and, as a result, the accuracy and speed of communicating information to our various constituents improved dramatically. Previous struggles to manage the communication of information, such as registration dates and policy changes, were almost instantly alleviated by a streamlined communication process, a cross-trained staff, and a cooperative spirit.

Registration Troubleshooting Team

In addition to regular services offered by the various departments commonly responsible for helping students register for classes, we staffed a computer lab with representatives from admissions, advising, financial aid, and our SOAR Institute (a department dedicated to addressing specific needs associated with underprepared students) for the purpose of providing "troubleshooting" aid to those who needed a place to register and were likely not to need the full services of our regular departments. Most importantly, staff members were positioned at the main entrance of campus to help students determine the best place to register quickly and efficiently. The Troubleshooting Team provided quick assistance to students experiencing difficulty with the registration process while reducing the long lines in the front-line offices.

Students are more likely to attend a college if their registration experience is positive. In the context of a supportive environment, the entire college works hard to assist students by creating a friendly and helpful

atmosphere. Professional development for student services staff members and the reorganization of the front-line offices to provide relational-focused and proactive advising have been rewarded by an increase in the number of students using our services. Listening to students and adapting best practices are catalysts for change. Working together and making a collective commitment to improving the educational experiences for students will, ultimately, help them become successful graduates and contributing members of our community.

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