Early-alert system in a university

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ABSTRACT

This proposal seeks to identify the potential benefits of introducing an early-alert system in the UAE-based University. Early-alert system is a formal process of identifying outward manifestations of a slowdown in academic performance, absenteeism and withdrawal symptoms and aspects related to lack of motivation and interest in academics. Early-alert systems aim to check the aforesaid symptoms with the help of a well-dedicated early-alert intervention team who work on the pscyho-social dimensions and help the students in gathering pace in academics. The proposal shall delve into some of the examples where many universities have implemented the early-alert systems and give recommendations as to why the UAE-based University should implement such a system.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

This proposal seeks to identify the potential benefits of introducing an early-alert system in the UAE-based University. Early-alert system is a formal process of identifying outward manifestations of a slowdown in academic performance, absenteeism and withdrawal symptoms and aspects related to lack of motivation and interest in academics. Early-alert systems aim to check the aforesaid symptoms with the help of a well-dedicated early-alert intervention team who work on the pscyho-social dimensions and help the students in gathering pace in academics. The proposal shall delve into some of the examples where many universities have implemented the early-alert systems and give recommendations as to why the UAE-based University should implement such a system.

Primarily, an early-alert system is a proactive feedback mechanism where the students are provided support from the mentors in cases of early manifestations of poor academic performance in terms of poor grades or academic disengagement in terms of high rates of absenteeism. There are two reasons why early-alert systems are being favored: first, it has been observed that there are a number of students who enter the institutions of higher education without any proper foundation grounding or skills; and second, there is a technological revolution which facilitates in the further success of the early-alert system in any academic setting. The main aspects while implementing an early-alert system in an institution of higher learning pertain to identification of targets and setting clear metrics on which the early-alert systems shall be based. Further, early-alert system is based on a personalized feedback and mentoring where interventions are carried out by an engaging team. The team comprises of faculty members or other student support departments in the higher educational

institution.

Many institutions of higher learning have adopted early-alert system. For instance, Marymount College has a special "R.E.T.A.I.N." programme which stands for "Re-Engagement Through Academic Intervention Now". In this programme, faculty are asked to fill the forms regarding the performance of the students and identify if any student is encountering challenges in academics or showing inadequate performance or higher rates of absenteeism. Contingent upon the feedback, academic advisors are contacted and students are sent to the Learning Assistance Center and further counseling is provided to them with the help of the academic advisors and faculty. Likewise, in North Central State College (Ohio), early-alert systems are in place to check the academic issues like non-attendance, poor homework, poor tests, etc. At the University of Wisconsin-Oskosh, the issues pertaining to student retention are being identified and there is a peer tutor programme besides other forms of assistance.

While introduction of an early-alert system in the UAE-based University is a forthcoming idea, several considerations need to be borne in mind. First, there is a lot of diversity among the students entering the UAE University and with a multi-cultural environment (Raven, 2011); there are challenges of managing the needs and requirements of all the students (Hijazi, Zoubeidi, Abdalla, Al-Waqfi, & Harb, 2008). There are challenges pertaining to the bi-lingual pedagogy where Arabic and English are being adopted during teaching (Gallagher, 2011). There are cases where students lack fundamental skills in writing or math. Second, a well-dedicated early alert team needs to be instituted where the representatives from the university are involved in the mentoring and counseling of the students. Furthermore, intervention strategies should be chalked out in detail wherein there are clear guidelines which should be followed while managing students. Metrics should be framed to measure the success of the early-alert system. Such metrics may be linked with retention rate, withdrawal rate, drop-out rate, improved academic performance and student satisfaction rates, etc. In case of any shortfalls, early-alert system should be revamped and modified accordingly.

To sum up, while designing an early-alert system in the UAE-based University, it is important that the system be institutionalized and all the relevant stakeholders participate in the system. Introduction of an early-alert system would go a long way in building upon the reputation of the University and employability of the students.

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