D2L is Not Just for Teaching Course Content: Increasing Student Success Using Timberwolves Helpful Resources in the Virtual Environment (THRIVE)

In response to the pandemic, our college shifted the modality of all its courses online. The transition to our new virtual environment posed significant challenges for students and faculty. To mitigate the problem of these new challenges, the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Chapter of Lone Star College-Tomball (LSC-T), Alpha Rho Mu (APM), worked in tandem with various campus departments, including the LSC-T President's Cabinet (LSCTPC), to develop comprehensive online courserooms with the college's online learning management system, Desire2Learn (D2L). Our team's ultimate goal and the purpose of Timberwolves Helpful Resources in the Virtual Environment (THRIVE) was to increase student success and teaching excellence.

Project Design

Significant communication between APM and the LSCTPC led to our focus on providing resources students and faculty needed to adapt to and overcome challenges the new online environment posed by compiling vital resources in two easy-to-access (D2L) courses. By providing comprehensive resources in centralized locations, students and faculty could focus on student success and teaching excellence immediately and in the future instead of searching for information in multiple locations.

Our project's goals included:

- Making the transition from face-to-face to online learning easier.
- Providing resources to maintain student success and teaching excellence.
- Conducting pre- and post-surveys regarding vital resources needed.
- Collaborating with college departments.
- Creating motivational videos and historical videos.

The project was divided into two phases. Phase One aimed to make the transition from face-to-face instruction to virtual smoother by providing five modules within D2L. The modules include:

- *Resources:* A list of available software programs and a staff directory.
- *Creativity:* This module provides interactive ways to present content to students.
- *How-To:* Demonstrative videos about apps and D2L functionality.
- *Templates:* Templates are provided that overview D2L course features.
- *Engagement:* Demonstrate apps and exercises for improved student engagement.

Phase Two aimed to provide students with resources to help them adapt to and overcome challenges in online academic environments. The modules include:

- *Emotional Health and Wellness:* Provides mental health and wellness resources.
- *Basic Needs:* Provides a list of local food pantries and clinics' contact information.
- *Financial Assistance:* Archived information is made available to students from Lone Star College's scholarship applications and CARES Act.
- *Campus Contacts:* An index of student services, campus directory, and emergency contacts.
- *How-To:* Videos demonstrating how to access resources and navigate online courses.

The APM Chapter Leadership Team recognized the efforts required for this task and sought the appropriate key stakeholders in LSC-T departments and organizations on- and off-campus to help provide diverse and inclusive resources. Ultimately, this accomplished the aforementioned goals and resulted in over 100 hours of collaboration and 120 resources within the courserooms.

Partnerships Made the Difference

Collaborative discussion occurred all summer. Personal experiences with the abrupt transition during spring 2020 helped the team brainstorm ideas for THRIVE. Once the team solidified project goals, the next steps included reviewing LSC's Strategic Goals and Mission Statement, which again verified clear connections to the college's goals and values. The team began working on the project, which included multiple meetings totaling over ten hours of collaboration for the proposal alone. The final proposal included a detailed PowerPoint presentation, script, and document detailing the project's goals, the potential time frames, and departments the team intended to collaborate with on campus. After the final project proposal was approved by advisors and sent to the LSCTPC, the team switched gears and began preparations for a presentation with multiple rehearsals. Remarkably, our APM officer team was invited to present our proposal to the entire LSCTPC, a first in our chapter's history! We received astounding support and encouraging suggestions, such

as the inclusion of motivational videos from faculty and staff to support one another and submitting an article about the project to an academic journal.

The planning stage collaborations included:

- Members of the LSCTPC, including the president; vice presidents of instruction, administration, and student success; the chief strategist; presidents of the Faculty Senate and PSSA.
- APM Leadership Team.

Implementation collaborations included:

- Multimedia Services Manager (MSM) and a work-study student on video design.
- LMS consultant.
- Educational psychologist for survey development.
- The Faculty Senate for assistance with our faculty survey and motivational student videos.
- Student Life and Student Government Association assisted with our student survey and faculty motivational videos.
- The counseling department and Communities in Schools assisted with gathering emotional health and wellness resources.

Securing Training

We received ongoing technical/skills training from an LMS consultant, an educational psychologist, and the MSM. Our team lacked many of the skills required to implement the project, such as knowledge of our college's LMS, developing surveys, and recording videos. When the project began, it became apparent professional training was necessary to use our college's LMS, considering none of the officers had experience working in the system. This became more evident once the project was approved, and the THRIVE chair and co-chair were given administrative rights to build the courserooms that would house the project's resources in D2L, access that is not usually granted to students. Our advisor collaborated with our LMS consultant to gain insight into the important aspects of building the courserooms from scratch and connected our team with the LMS consultant. A training meeting was held with the project chairs about course building within the LMS. As the project progressed, additional training with the LMS consultant was needed to address new ideas and add topics to the courserooms, which included a five-star Likert scale rating for discussion threads and how to create rubric templates. The project chairpersons quickly added content and resources to the courserooms on their own and gained valuable insight into the difficulties faculty face when building their own courserooms for students.

Implementation Process

- *Initial steps and implementation.* Early in the project, the team designed a faculty survey inquiring about resources to assist with the virtual transition. We met with an educational psychologist to learn how to create the faculty surveys,

the first of which received ten responses that helped determine the most important resources to gather. The motivational videos required the expertise of a professional videographer to determine the length, content, design, and filming practices. We met with the MSM to formulate an implementation plan for the motivational videos and the processes to complete them. Chapter advisors and experienced officers provided mentoring in leadership skills during the implementation of the project. This included explanations of the planning and implementation processes and how to network and collaborate with college departments.

- *Closing the loop: Long-term implementation.* We held a closing meeting with the LSCTPC and the Basic Needs Council (BNC) for a final review of the project. Faculty Senate overwhelmingly approved our proposal to integrate THRIVE directly into student courses. During the final review, the LSC-T Chief Strategist finalized the transition of responsibility to the BNC for the student courseroom and the Center for Organizational and Teaching Excellence for the faculty courseroom.

Results: Quantitative and Qualitative

The collaboration of all stakeholders led to significant outcomes.

Quantitative outcomes:

- Over 120 resources to aid students and faculty with overcoming the obstacles of the new online learning environment.
- The initial ten faculty survey responses revealed over 60 percent of respondents felt specific online resources are needed.
- The creation of two motivational videos from multiple students and a historical project video to encourage our campus and community viewers.
- The integration of discussion threads for students and faculty provides opportunities for adding future resources.
- Likert scales on discussion threads allow resource rating to further assist faculty.

Qualitative outcomes:

- Enhanced online learning and instructional teaching experience. Professionally credited resources provide limitless project potential.
- BNC's Lead said, "This came at the perfect time and will help students and faculty alike. This type of resource is long overdue; I commend you all for the forethought and time given to helping the world of academia at LSC-Tomball for many years to come!"

Leaving Our Legacy

Our work continues through the BNC, which is carrying out our vision:

- Including the reference link to the courserooms in the course syllabi.
- Embedding THRIVE courserooms as a module into LSC-Tomball online sections.
- Adding THRIVE to EDUC 1300 courses.
- Sharing THRIVE at new student orientations.
- Sharing with current and new employees.

Learning Outcomes and Conclusion

Early collaboration with administration and faculty led to an understanding that administrators, faculty, staff, and community members are willing to help ensure students have the resources to succeed. While there was learning throughout this project's implementation, including leadership development, collaboration, and flexibility, there was an even greater takeaway. Comprehensive resources addressing student needs are available from LSC, LSC-T, and the community. Compiling resources in D2L courserooms make them more accessible for students, leading to greater student success and the rewarding potential to change lives now and in the future.

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