ABSTRACT

Supporting faculty and students in online courses has been found to be a key to satisfaction, retention and program continuation. This presentation will address how the findings of a predictive study of student support and services issues from 77 institutions in North America, Europe and South Africa, was applied to the help desk at an online institution. Common themes and methods of resolution are presented and discussed, with a focus on improving retention and achieving cost savings.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENT AND FORMAT

Supporting faculty and students in online courses has been found to be a key to satisfaction, retention and program continuation. However, the studies upon which these findings are based, examine the issues from a very the perspective of a very limited number of individual institutions (Bishop & SchWeber, 2004; Ferazzi, 2003; Kaminski & Milheim, 2002; Fredrickson, Pickett, Shea, Pelz & Swan, 2000; Hartman, Dzuiban & Moskal, 2000) and are somewhat dated. An exhaustive review of the literature and consultation with other researchers confirms that no multi-institutional studies exist in this area. Understanding common support issues on a multi-institutional basis would be of significant benefit to the online learning community from both support program improvement and research perspectives.

To address this issues, this study utilized call logs from service desks that provide support to online programs at 77 institutions in North America, Europe and South Africa, as well as open-ended interviews with service desk personnel. Qualitative data was thematically coded using iterative, interpretive analysis. Analytical induction was then be applied to coded data, thus quantifying it to count form. Descriptive statistics were applied to count data and regression analysis used to determine if any given class of problems were unique to specific institutions. The findings from this study were then applied at an online institution. The results of this application are discussed in this session, with a focus on improving student retention and achieving increased cost effectiveness.