Recruiting and Retaining Students in the New Millennium: Issues Facing Online Programs and Possible Solutions

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Abstract: This presentation will discuss the need for and challenge of recruiting qualified students for graduate study in online programs the new millennium. To recruit students in the current climate, issues that need to be considered include: 1) Ease of the application process; 2) Marketing strategies for programs including establishing an online presence and visibility; 3) Accessibility and flexibility of coursework for a changing student population; and 4) Academic Standards issues. The recruitment model developed by the online Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC) program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) will be discussed as well as other recruitment approaches and strategies. The UALR program currently has 215 students enrolled in its MRC program. The presentation will also discuss how attendees can develop a recruitment strategy that is tailored to meet their own needs.

Overview

This presentation will discuss the need for and challenge of recruiting qualified students for graduate study in online programs the new millennium. To recruit students in the current climate, issues that need to be considered include: 1) Ease of the application process; 2) Marketing strategies for programs including establishing an online presence and visibility; 3) Accessibility and flexibility of coursework for a changing student population; and 4) Academic Standards issues. The recruitment model developed by the online Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling (MRC) program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) will be discussed as well as other recruitment approaches and strategies. The presentation will also discuss how attendees can develop a recruitment strategy that is tailored to meet their own needs.

The UALR program began as a brand new, completely online program in June 2000 with 14 students. Utilizing an approach, which combines established methodologies and technical innovations, the program has grown consistently and currently has 215 students enrolled in its MRC program. The program has had students from 49 of the 50 states, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Canada, and several students in the military who were serving in other countries. One key factor in attracting and retaining students is that the creative techniques developed by the UALR program has allowed them to deliver all the required services at a distance that have conventionally been delivered on-campus and in-person. The model uses: 1) Videostreaming technology and chromakey equipment to allow presentation of online curriculum that, while being in an asynchronous video format, give students gives students the feel of actually being in the classroom; and 2) Webcams and web-based videoconferencing technology to facilitate face-to-face individual and group interaction and feedback with students at distant field sites that gives them a chance to refine their counseling skills in a safe environment.