

Student Support System in Higher Education Institutions

A. Krishnamoorthy and H. Srimathi

Abstract--- *The main aim of higher education institutions is to provide the best ambience for learning and wide opportunities for the students to excel in their career. The student support services become common phenomenon and attracting factors which motivate and enhance the academic performance of students. The nurturing of personal, emotional and social well-being of students in adolescent age is essential as the institutions prepare the graduates with productive roles for future social life. The study examines the support services across campuses as they impact admission enrolment and student life.*

Keywords--- *Campus Life, Mentoring, Skill Development, Scholarship, Loans, Social Responsibility, Suicide, Counseling.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The student support services comprise of a cluster of services and activities that are intended to make the learning atmosphere friendlier. The support services are classified into administration, academics, special assistance and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) enabled services as shown in Table 1. From entry to graduation, the institutions extend the support by promoting academic success and degree attainment (UNESCO, 2002). Most of the institutions conduct orientation programmes prior to commencement of classes, which shall benefit the students to familiar about campus and academic environment.

Table 1: Student Support Services

<p>Administration</p> <p>Admission</p> <p>Flexible office hours</p> <p>Handbooks & News Letters</p> <p>Campus code of ethics</p> <p>Campus map</p>	<p>Special Assistance</p> <p>Educational loan assistance</p> <p>Scholarship scheme</p> <p>Pre & post arrival services, orientation</p> <p>Mentoring – Career and personal guidance</p> <p>Interpersonal, Inter cultural development</p> <p>Residential, health and stress issues</p> <p>Senior & alumni interaction</p> <p>Employer request on certificate verification</p>
<p>Academic</p> <p>Pre academic counseling - Academic plan</p> <p>Academic counseling</p> <p>Monitor academic progress</p> <p>Course selection</p> <p>Study strategy improvement</p> <p>Bridge courses / Personal tutoring</p> <p>Value addition & skill development courses</p> <p>Industry institute interaction / projects</p> <p>Project / product development opportunity</p> <p>Conference / Journal publications</p> <p>Recognitions, awards and medals</p> <p>Semester abroad programs</p> <p>Student mobility</p>	<p>ICT enabled Services</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Webmail</p> <p>Webinars</p> <p>Virtual campus tour</p> <p>Online admission tracking system</p> <p>Student administration</p> <p>Examination management</p> <p>Learning management resources</p> <p>Call centre services</p> <p>Mobile application support</p>

A. Krishnamoorthy, Professor & Associate Dean, Department of Electronics and Instrumentation Engineering, SASTRA Deemed University, Thanjavur, E-mail: ak@eee.sastra.edu

H. Srimathi, Professor & Assistant Director, Directorate of Admissions, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, India. E-mail: srimathi.h@srmuniv.ac.in

The student handbook which includes vision, mission, quality objectives, academic calendar, exam schedule, rules, regulations, policies, services and standardized form will be useful to explore the support services. The fully integrated support services will benefit the students in many ways ranging from admission, financial assistance, clarifications on fee payments, academic counseling, personal tutoring to solve course assignments, career advancement through project and product development, value addition courses, disciplinary advice, examinations, results and improvement, opportunity to do semester abroad programmes, interaction with seniors and renowned alumni in the field, assistance in personal issues etc. The mandate services in student support are academic guidance & tutoring, mentoring, personal counseling, cross-cultural training, sustained facility for students with disability, safety and security. The student, institution and community engagement was briefed in (UNESCO, 2009) manual as shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1: Student Engagement (Source: UNESCO, 2009)

II. ACADEMIC GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

The academic advising is important one as student needs to choose their career paths, selection of electives, specializations, inter-disciplinary courses, project guidance and internships. The students struggle on choosing career path with lack of knowledge, where the assistance is required for both slow and accelerated learners (Walsh, 2000).

The accelerated performers must be given with additional learning, engaged with innovative practices, where the slow learners will be guided to improve their academic performance. As the drop-outs and leakages are more in higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and other regulatory authorities insist the institutions to appoint academic mentors for group of students to assess their progress and apply different strategies to enhance the performance. The group activities, additional coaching, and bridge courses are some of the practices to assist the slow learners.

The suicide attempts in campus get increased due to various factors including examination fear, depression in adolescent age, caste factor, financial status, ragging and sexual harassment (Pandey, 2017). There is a need of

professional personal counselor in the campus on one-to-one to discuss students personal problems and stress. The student satisfaction of academic guidance and personal counseling in a institutions is recorded for set of 50 students and presented in percentage as given in Fig. 2. Many of the students recorded that there is no separate professional for personal counseling and they are not able to feel confidence on approaching them when available. The lack of professionalism, fear of confidentiality is some of the factors which make them reluctant to approach professional counselors. As the suicides are increasing trend in higher education campuses, there is a need of well being centre and professional personal counselors in institutions.

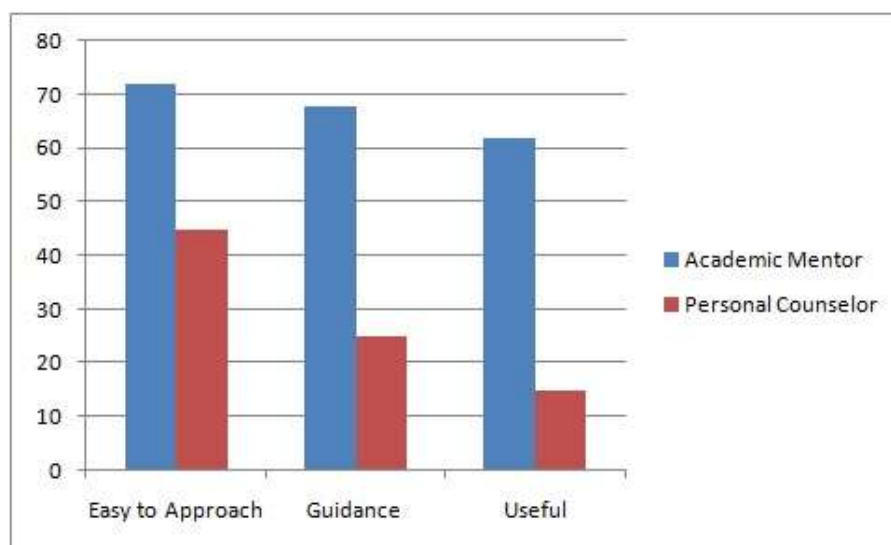


Fig. 2: Student Satisfaction in Mentoring & Counseling

III. CAMPUS LIFE

The campus facilities should ensure that the students develop overall abilities in cultural, recreational and sports activities also, in addition to the regular academics (Audin et al, 2003). The hostels are second home for students, should be a hub of leisure activities with well-maintained mess, power backup and wireless network facilities. Students must be encouraged to pursue a wide range of extracurricular and hobbies in their leisure time with events including both entertaining and competitive. Indoor and outdoor games, gymnasium, yoga and meditation, hobby clubs etc., will help them to develop both physic and mental health.

The campuses are expected to be free from ragging and students must be oriented towards punishments on ragging even when they are silent partners (UGC, 2009). The 24 X 7 anti-ragging helpline was established by UGC. The security service guards are to be assigned duties round the clock to ensure safety of the campus inmates and avoid intruders. The shopping complex, shop for stationery items, tailoring units, laundry services, cafeterias, banks, ATMs, first aid, hospital, medical facilities including pharmacies, travel ticket booking, photocopying, browsing centres and courier services are the other additional facilities expected in the campuses. The transportation facilities provide accessibility to commute from different areas of the city to institution by covering various routes. The estate office service maintenance takes care of cleanliness, repairing and ensures hygienic environment. The student responses of campus facilities are recorded in Table 2. The study would like to record that the universities and tier-1

private institutions has more campus facilities comparing affiliated / single-stream institutions.

Table 2: Response to Campus Facilities

Campus Facilities	Availability	Access	Updation
Student Residences			
Campus Cleanliness			
Wifi facility			
Campus safety			
Career counseling & Placement			
Transportation			
Food services, nutrition			
Indoor sports facility			
Outdoor sports facility			
Gym			
Health centre			
Hobby clubs			
Sponsorship for extra-curricular			

Positive response
 Need improvement

IV. TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

Higher education institutions can now find solutions for its student support services through Information and Communication Technology for admission, talent management, research, administration, financial management, examination, library and learning management system in the cloud / intranet including mobile devices as shown in Fig 3. The applications are termed as Customer relationship management (CRM), Enterprise resource planning (ERP), Content Management System (CMS) and Learning Management System. The challenge is on integrating different modules and creating automated workflow to fasten the responses. The service begins even from admission by doing digital marketing, extended for career guidance, registration and including transcripts requests. A web based student support system helps the management to interoperate with different application module to provide information.

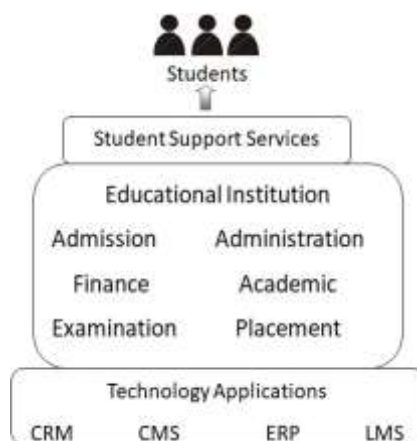


Fig. 3: Technology Services

V. SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Though the revision of syllabi is feasible only after a prescribed duration, the industries expect the students acquire updated knowledge which the scenario demands and also be imparted with latest trends (Arnold, 2018). The skill development cells help the students to learn technological advancements and innovations in their core field of education as value additions in addition to the prescribed curricula and syllabi (Franck, 2017). The professional associations and special interest clubs provide the forum to learn and share the latest creative approaches, innovations, best practices and exhibit simulation models. They provide opportunity to get connected with interdisciplinary members and learn the experiences of superiors in the field.

The language learning centre provides unique opportunities to learners to nurture their language skills and communication. Many institutions run compulsory soft skills training and foreign language courses to increase the employment opportunities. The students will be confident enough to approach interviews through such training. The major contributors in campus placements are the multinational companies which primarily expect the students to communicate better. Some of the institutions permit leading competitive coaching centres in their premises to train their students for competitive and other career advancement examinations.

VI. FOSTERING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Fostering social responsibility in higher education improves engagements with the community outreach and reinforces the social values amongst the youth. The community engagement helps the students to learn about the local realities. It may be through supporting and tutoring in local schools, assisting in clinics, promoting several awareness programme, help in maintaining tree plantation, environment cleaning and garbage collection etc. The present schemes of National Service Scheme (NSS), National Cadet Corps (NCC) and volunteer clubs help the students in community engagement. Few universities have established rural development cells and offer programmes on social work. However, considering the huge diverged population who live in underprivileged facilities, there is a need for systematization and mapping of the need analysis and more number of youth volunteers willing to serve in rural areas is expected. The UGC on February 2019, issued a public notice to all higher education institutions with respect to curricula on social responsibility and community engagement to inculcate socio-economic development and active community engagement in the minds of youth.

VII. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE THROUGH BANK LOANS

With subsidies provided by the government is declining, cost associated in pursuing higher education is becoming exorbitant and hence there is a definite need for financial support to the pursuant through financial aids, especially institutional funding. The loans funded by banks and other financial institutions, as directed by the government, to students to pursue higher education are a popular measure for facilitating the higher education. Educational loan thus sanctioned has to be repaid at a reasonable nominal interest rate after the completion of the programme and after securing an employment. This ensures that every student has an opportunity to pursue higher education of his / her choice with necessary financial supports, with affordable repayment process on a later date. This social commitment has resulted in the betterment of socially and financially weaker sections of the society and proved to be a successful social welfare measure and social banking. A parent can avail exemption for the amount

paid as the interest of education loan under income tax benefits until the student starts to repay the loan. The banks prescribe norms and marginal loan based on government recommendations for non-vocational, vocational, professional, self-financing programmes offered in India and abroad.

UGC has created and maintaining “Vidya Lakshmi” portal for educational loans to help students in applying and tracking their applications. Partnerships have to be developed between the educators, the students and the employers with the banking sector and Government playing a crucial role in linking all the stakeholders. While banks have been providing educational loans for higher education for some time now, issues relating to non-repayment, tracking of students and the possibility of educational loans turning into non-performing assets continue to hamper them. Collaboration with all segments at all levels probably holds the key to successful and continuous financial services.

VIII. SCHOLARSHIP SERVICES

Students who are ambitious of pursuing higher education and research in the various institutions within the country and outside are also entitled to avail various scholarships. The Government provides scholarships, fee waiver and hostel facilities under social justice and empowerment schemes to under-privileged group. Some of the state governments provide full fee waiver to students joined through counseling under first generation of graduates' category (i.e. the student will be the first to graduate in the family). In addition to fee waiver, few state governments introduced distribution of free laptops/tablets and semester abroad programmes/internships for the students of government colleges. The various scholarship facilities are listed in government scholarship portal as shown in Fig. 4.

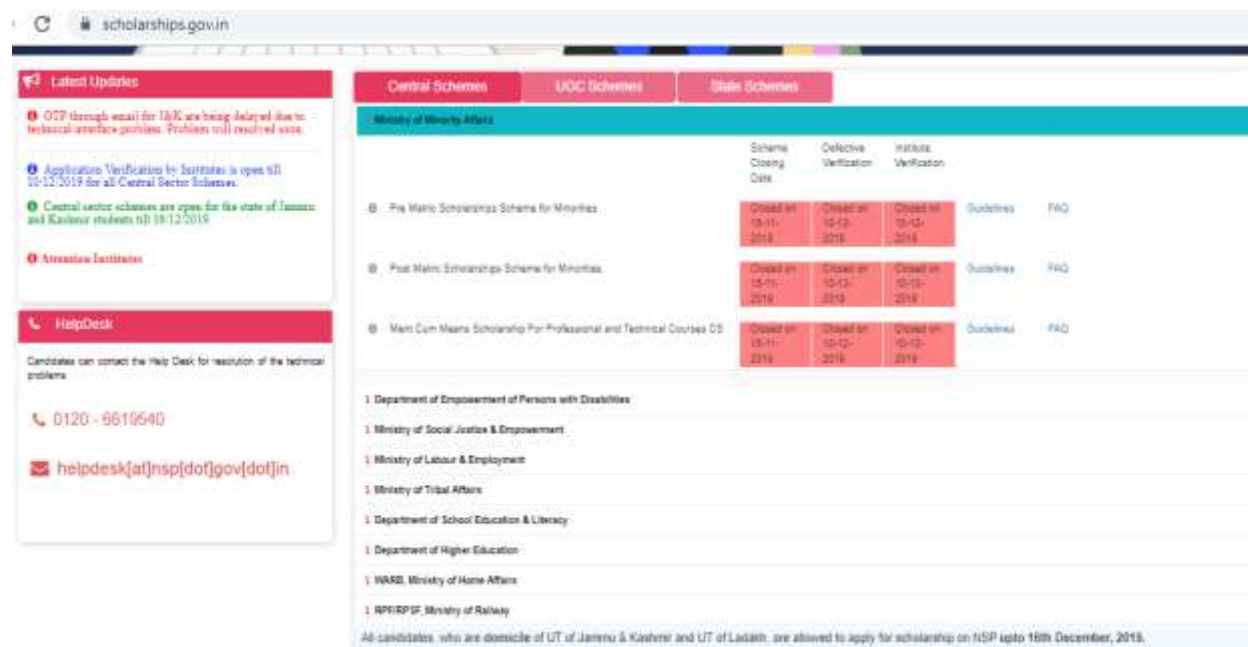


Fig. 4: Screenshot of National Scholarship Portal

UGC promotes scholarship & fellowship every year for students belonging to minority communities, SC / ST categories, single girl child in a family, students with disabilities, rank holders, women candidates, teachers and

researchers etc. All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) provides scholarships to GATE (Graduate Aptitude Test for Engineering) examination qualified students for pursuing engineering post graduate programmes in select institutions.

The private educational institutions play a vital role in offering scholarships for top rankers, minority students, physically challenged students, socio-economic disdained students, and for achievers in sports. They follow differential fee structures based on ranking and merit system, and internships to attract meritorious students. The voluntary foundations run by philanthropists provide financial support to needy and financially constrained students. The aspiring intelligent students will be benefited through such assistance. The assistance through these schemes is applicable to any qualified student irrespective of their caste, community, gender and religion. There are several international scholarships to Indian students offered by governments, organizations and few universities. The detailed list of scholarships for Indian Students is listed in Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Web page. In addition the government research funding organizations also provide various inter-government joint scholarship schemes to carry out research programmes and participate in International conferences and forums.

IX. CONCLUSION

The present generation student needs are unique and complex. The millennial students are tech savvy, access to internet, independent, nuclear family background, obtained target specific coaching and multi co-curricular training in school level. The students expect the similar kind of comfort what they enjoyed in school at higher education campuses with more vibrant opportunities including technological services. The parents too expect existence of constant counseling & interaction, personalized opportunities, overall development in the campus. The institutions are forced to establish student support services for academic advice, career-guidance, emotional well-being, student clubs and activities to focus on holistic development of students. Higher education institutions have to demonstrate that they can satisfy the genuine needs and demands of the students through good governance, processes, financing and student services. A well-established academic support helps to maintain standards at the highest levels and ensures sustained improvements on quality.

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