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Setting the Foundation for Student Support



Mt. San Antonio College, Walnut CA

Introduction

As Mount San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) continued to implement the California Virtual Campus (CVC) Course Exchange, we strengthened our support of faculty with a revamped Faculty Center for Learning Technology (FCLT) and noticed the absence of a student-facing equivalent service especially for online learning. The idea was produced to form a program focused on providing students with classroom technology support that is parallel to what the FCLT provides to faculty. The mission of the Canvasador Program is to help current Mt. SAC students successfully navigate Canvas as well as other learning platforms that faculty use inside of Canvas and in their courses. The unique feature of the program is that it offers peer-to-peer assistance which creates opportunities for students to learn from one another, build rapport, and foster a sense of community.

The launch of the program started with a highly successful recruitment campaign with over 100 applications received. After a deliberative and thorough search, seven very talented and highly skilled students were selected to serve as the role of a Canvasador.



Mt. San Antonio College Canvasadors

Just as the Canvasadors began to lay the foundation for this exciting new program, in early March 2020, COVID-19 created the need for the Canvasadors to develop immediate self-help resources for students who found themselves struggling with the new all-online experience. Over the last 10 months, the team created synchronous and asynchronous resources for students which include tutorials, short videos, infographics, guides, and live workshops. In addition, the development of a homegrown ticketing system allowed Canvasadors to respond to over 127 student inquiries and created two student surveys which yielded rich data that helped guide the Canvasadors work as they learned about the most pressing technological needs of Mt. SAC students.

Creating a Presence on Campus and Online

Prior to the online shift for the college, the Canvasadors held weekly drop-in office hours and tabled outside the campus library in an effort to provide immediate assistance to students and promote the program. However, once the campus physically closed, it prompted this program to think of ways to establish its presence solely online.

One of the initial steps for the Canvasadors was to build a Canvasador course shell where students could check out resources and receive direct help. Early in the program two course shells were deployed, one where Professors opted their students into the Canvasador course, and another where students could opt in themselves. These were mostly replicas of one another, with slight adjustments to cater to their audience.

The next step involved creating a widespread social media presence in order to reach students. Accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were created and proved to be very successful channels of communications with students. A YouTube channel was established to house all video content.

On campus, office hours were promoted outside the Academic Support and Achievement Center (ASAC) to encourage students to walk in and ask question. Student fairs were attended in order to spread the word to passersby of our services. A table was set up with items related to canvas, offering student assistance with any on-the-spot problems they had.

Data Gathering and Getting Student Feedback

Due to the shift to online learning, the number of courses utilizing Canvas grew along with the need for Canvasadors to support students with this new and challenging experience. With no information directly available on what students needed, it was determined a survey should be created and that it would be announced through a course shell that all students are enrolled in by default: The Mountie Student Hub.

The utilization of The Mountie Student Hub is significant because of the impact the Canvasadors were able to make within the hub. For example, messaging within the hub allows the Canvasadors to reach 67,000 credit and noncredit students who are automatically enrolled in The Mountie Student Hub with each registration cycle.

At the end of spring 2020, the Canvasadors worked on the development of the first technology learning needs survey. Utilizing the messaging portals within The Mountie Student Hub allowed students to quickly access and complete the survey. The data captured allowed the Canvasadors to get a better insight into the experiences of the students and the pressure points as they relate to their online learning. With the data available, the Canvasadors were better equipped to support their peers, and to advocate for their needs in a new, unexpected environment.

As the need for the Canvasador program became integral to meeting the technological support needs for students, it became clear that this program should have a support structure whose mission is also aligned with a focus on serving students. The Canvasador program made the shift from the Faculty Center for Learning Technology (FCLT) to the Academic Support and Achievement Center (ASAC) whose mission is to provide academic support services directly to students.

Being the Bridge Between Students and Administration

As Mt. SAC students, the Canvasadors have an understanding of some of the challenges a student might encounter. They have insight on the frustrations and fear of students through online interactions. When there is a common theme for these complaints, the Canvasadors will forward any complaints or suggestions to distance learning faculty leaders and administrators for follow-up. The Canvasadors also had the opportunity to attend Distance Learning Committee Meetings and shared the student perspective with committee members.

An example of this is Canvasadors’ response to the student experience with Proctorio. When there was a major concern for an online proctoring program, Proctorio, Canvasadors shared their experiences and worries with the faculty. FCLT staff organized a meeting with a representative from Proctorio, where students and staff asked questions and shared concerns about Proctorio. Canvasadors reached out to the student government and invited two other students based on the recommendation from a student government member. Hearing these concerns from the student body cemented the need to spread information to address these concerns and clarify any confusion.

The Human Connection: Helping Students

The Canvasadors are the voices of Mt. SAC students, utilizing their experience to support other students in their success. The worries of students are addressed, and solutions are made to ease their minds. The plan of action for most of these solutions is publishing information through social media platforms, creating relevant resources, and hosting workshops.

The Canvasadors strive to keep a constant social media presence by having a steady stream of content to publish across platforms. The goal is to notify students on Canvasadors’ updates from upcoming workshops to newly-created student resources. Furthermore, Canvasadors used the platforms to update followers on exciting news, workshops, or events hosted by student clubs and student programs.

In the current online learning environment, creating classroom-related tools and guides for students are essential. For example, as Proctorio has been an increasingly popular proctoring tool for professors, Canvasadors created infographics to inform students on what to expect using Proctorio.

As making content for the masses is essential, a personal touch is necessary in establishing a relationship with students. Hosting online workshops and one-on-ones are the best methods in directly interacting with students, where people can put a face to the name. After transitioning online, the Canvasadors have adapted and created a virtual office space via Zoom, where students can drop-in to webcam with one of the team members. The Canvasadors’ goal is to maintain and build a bona fide connection with Mt. SAC students.

The Results

Based on 2,000 student survey responses, 127 inquiries recorded from the ticketing system, three requests from student services for Canvasadors to facilitate “Canvas 101 workshops” for their students has proven a genuine need for this program. One Canvasador is embedded in the Minority Males Initiative Program, a safe space for group of students to support each other and to normalize help-seeking behavior. Additionally, the positive student feedback speaks to the quality and satisfaction of the resources and services delivered.

Our data analysis indicates there are many opportunities for the Canvasadors to respond and grow with each successive term. We want to learn more about the technological needs students have and how we can build resources to support our students. For example, the Canvasadors created tutorial videos on topics such as “how to contact your professor in Canvas and “how to submit assignments in Canvas.” We need to study the analytics of the videos to gauge usage and the effectiveness of the information. We look forward to improving our services to students and to the ways the college can institutionalize the Canvasador program.

Additional Information

[Guide to Creating a Student Support Group](#)

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