Final Design Document: Online Student Ambassador Training

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To address the rapidly growing population of new online students and to support and nurture current online students, the University of North Georgia (UNG) created a new student organization, the Online Student Ambassadors. The Online Student Ambassadors are experienced online students that will serve as peer-mentors to new online students at UNG. These students may be completely at a distance, as there is no requirement at all for them to come to campus. In order to be selected as an ambassador, students must have proven themselves to be competent and responsive, as they are being trusted with providing guidance and assistance to new students. In order to provide the ambassadors with the knowledge required to succeed, and to serve as a continuous reference once they commence working with new students, I am creating an online training course and community, which I will facilitate in the Fall 2018 semester. This course will be housed within UNG’s eLearning (BrightSpace by D2L), with support communication through Microsoft 365 products (Outlook, Groups, and Teams).

# Goal

The Fall 2018 semester will be the first semester of the Online Student Ambassador organization. Because this group is new, the ambassadors are unsure of exactly how to best answer some of the questions they will receive, which questions they can (are allowed to) answer, and which questions or situations should be referred to an advisor. The goal of this instructional design project will be to provide ambassadors with the training needed to provide correct responses to new student frequently asked questions, to coach ambassadors how to handle difficult situations, how to determine if an issue is out of scope for an ambassador, and how to connect a student in need to a professional advisor when necessary.

## Learning Objectives

After completing the Online Student Ambassador training modules, the learners will be able to:

1. promptly and professionally respond to new student questions,
2. provide new students with correct responses to their questions,
3. determine appropriate follow-up questions/actions to resolve student issues,
4. determine if student question is appropriate for peer response, or if the issue should be referred to a professional advisor.

The Ambassadors are new to this position, and as of the end of Summer 2018 have not yet had any formal instruction, but have learned from their experience as online students at UNG. Since policies, procedures, and plans of study often change, ambassadors will be frequently informed of updates. The effectiveness of this training course, and its supplemental communication channels could have significant impact on new online students, as they will be learning from the ambassadors. This peer-advising program was formed to help support UNG’s retention and persistence focus, with a goal of helping students persist to graduation, and create more Georgians with college degrees.

Ambassadors are students who choose to be leaders. Only students who want to join this group become part of this team - no one is forced or aggressively recruited to become an ambassador. There is currently no monetary reward, salary or other compensation. The ambassadors are somewhat self-selected, and since they chose to get involved to help others, it is our hope that they will complete the training. Potential ambassadors who do not complete the training will not be allowed to serve as ambassadors until the modules have been successfully completed.

# Environment

This course will be offered completely online and will reside within UNG’s eLearning (BrightSpace by D2L). The Online Student Ambassadors organization is based in eLearning, and in the future, ambassadors will be assisting students from within eLearning, so it is desirable to keep this course in the same environment. Ambassadors also need access to a more immediate form of communication for quick collaborations outside of the LMS. To accommodate this need, a Microsoft Team has been created. Using the Teams app allows the group to have easy access to email each other, view a group calendar, create a group notebook, send instant messages, and have quick video meetings. There is an app available for mobile devices, which can make this option more convenient than using BB Collaborate within eLearning, especially for quick, on-the-fly meetings.

Ambassadors will be expected to complete the online course before their first semester of service, and will retain access and will need to be continuously active in Discussion area of the course (Open Forum) throughout the semester. It is expected that the online learning experience will need to be revised often, as much of the content within the course is subject to be updated and adjusted at least annually. Also, the Open Forum questions from each semester will be added to the content for subsequent semesters.

Learners will be able to access the course at any time of day to access the course content. There will be synchronous meetings that ambassadors will be expected to attend. These meetings will be held at approximately two weeks before courses begin and one week before courses begin. Follow-up sessions will occur on Days 3 and 5 of courses. These dates have been selected as they have specific milestones for new online students, and have been identified as critical points for online student success at UNG.

The learners have already successfully completed online courses in the past, so there is no need for pre-training on how to use eLearning, and these students have computers and internet access so there is no additional equipment required to complete the learning modules. I will serve as the course facilitator during the initial training period. Once the semester begins, I will remain active in the course to answer questions from the ambassadors and moderate the discussion boards. As this fall will be the inaugural semester, I will be closely monitoring all information to ensure the information shared is correct.

# Target Participants

The learners in this course will be members of the new student organization, the Online Student Ambassadors at UNG. The size of this group will vary each semester, as some students graduate and new students join the organization, but there is a tentative target of maintaining at least 15 ambassadors each semester. In order to complete the course, students must have demonstrated successful completion of previous online courses at UNG, meaning that they have previous experience with the eLearning LMS and online learning in general.

Course content will be delivered via eLearning through readings, graphics, discussion boards and video. Videos with situational examples are currently in development for the course. These videos will be produced with Camtasia (for ease of editing), then loaded to Kaltura, which is integrated in eLearning and provides closed captioning for accessibility. All content will be available to be accessed at any time.

# Timeline for Implementation

The Online Student Ambassadors course must be ready for the ambassadors to be enrolled by August 6, 2018. Academic courses at UNG begin on August 20, 2018. The first group of ambassadors will participate in the course during the fall 2018 semester. It is expected that August will be the most active period in the semester, as new students enroll and have questions about getting started. I also expect to seek a peak in activity in mid-October, as students begin their second-short session online courses.

UNG participated in the Online Learning Consortium Scorecard Evaluation in 2015 to evaluate the services offered to online students. At that time, the online population did not seem large or active enough to support a successful student organization. Since that time, the number of online students at UNG has nearly doubled. Conversation about this course has been occurring for a period of about a year, but actual preparations did not begin until July of 2018. An informal list of tasks documenting the preparation for this course is listed below.

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| Task – What | Responsible Party - Who | Timeframe - When |
| Poll current UNG online students to determine interest in participating in a student organization for online students | S. Hulsey | Early Spring 2018 |
| Present plan for organization to SGA, and when approved, advertise/promote to students | S. Hulsey | Late Spring 2018 |
| Request Course Shell in eLearning for O.S.A. Course | S. Hulsey | June 2018 |
| Determine Course Modules and Course Content | S. Hulsey | July 2018 |
| Load html files, infographics, links, videos into course content. Create Discussion Forums and topics. | S. Hulsey | July 2018 |
| Enroll learners in course | S. Hulsey | August 6, 2018. |

# Instructional Strategies

This course will be built with a cooperative learning base, and will also include characteristics of a learning community. As ambassadors, these learners have had the shared experience of being online learners at UNG, and the new students that they will serve will also have that experience. Within their discussion forums and synchronous meeting, it will be encouraged that students ‘throw something out’ to the group – maybe a recent roadblock or frustration, and let their colleagues build on that. Sharing experiences allows the ambassadors to learn from each other and problem solve as a group. This group will also be tasked with compiling a Knowledge Base document. This will be a large group project that will culminate at the end of the semester. Learners will be able to choose the topic most interesting to them, presenting an opportunity for an authentic learning experience within the course.

Also, there will be open forums that allow ambassadors to ask questions that they do not know the answer to currently. These learners have a shared personal practice, supportive conditions, a shared vision, and a supportive course guide that is vested in their success. This course is similar to a mini professional learning community.

These learners have expressed willingness to serve and motivation to complete the course. The learners are comfortable with the topics and have proven their competence in the area as students. Their self-efficacy in this domain increases their motivation, and their expectancy x value ratio is high, as they can definitely expect to succeed (as they’ve been successful online students in the past), and will find value in helping others once they’ve completed the course.

# Modules

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| Module: | Description: |
| Module 1 – Introductions & Expectations | Learners will get-to-know each other through an Introduction Discussion Forum, review course calendar and confirm synchronous meeting dates/times, receive and complete the M.O.U. for Ambassador Expectations.  Levels of Learning: Understanding |
| Module 2 – Identifying Scope | In this module, learners will be presented with information about which students issues may need to be escalated beyond the ambassador. Includes reading, scenario video, and infographic.  Activities include a discussion forum, video quiz, and creation of decision tree.  Levels of Learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing |
| Module 3 – FAQs of Enrollment/Registration | Learners will be presented with information about new students questions related to advisement and registration. Includes reading, links, and infographics.  Activities include a discussion forum, video quiz, and self-assessment.  Levels of Learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing |
| Module 4 – FAQs of eLearning | Learners will be presented with information about new students questions related to eLearning and use of the LMS. Includes screencast presentation.  Activities include creating a discussion forum, completing a quiz, submitting a document to the assignment dropbox.  Levels of Learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing |
| Module 5 – Resources and Academic Support | Learners will be presented with information about resources available to online students such as Smarthinking online tutoring, online library services, student services such as counseling and career services, etc.  Activities include a discussion forum, completing a quiz, submitting proof of use of services to assignment dropbox.  Levels of Learning: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing |
| Module 6 – Knowledge Base Creation | \*Authentic Learning Task\*  Learners select an area of interest to create a knowledge base for future ambassadors. Collaborative / Cooperative learning project that will be added to throughout the semester. |

# Assessment

As the course facilitator, and as the Online Student Ambassador Advisor, I will be monitoring completion of the modules by the ambassadors (the learners). Each module will include a discussion forum and quiz (or self-assessment). The discussions will have guided topics, but will be open-ended, and will allow the learners to ask any remaining questions, and share their experiences with the module topic. Cooperative learning will be encouraged, and learners can ask each other the answers to questions, before asking the instructor. Quizzes and self-assessments will be used to check knowledge of topics covered. If answered incorrectly, the correct answer will be given, and the learner will be able to view all quiz questions and correct responses so that they can serve as a reference of information.

# Evaluation

Because the content of this course is subject to change, it will be reviewed each semester by a member of the DETI team, as well as representatives from advising and the registrar’s office. I will employ a pre-course and post-course survey to determine if the course was effective at increasing the knowledge of the ambassadors, and to solicit feedback for course improvement.

A screenshot of a social media post

Description automatically generated