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Improving Online Student Experience

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### Background

Whether it is through full online courses, web enhanced courses, or hybrid courses, nearly all students will participate in online learning during their time with Western Michigan University. Following national trends, online enrollment has grown continuously over the past five years at WMU (see Figure 1). This growth is expected to continue as the University looks to WMU-Online Education to be a driving force for generating new enrollments and retaining existing students.

Often, services that are available to main campus students are not extended to online student. Administrators and staff must find ways to reach these students with innovative and accessible student support services that are commensurate with the services available to main campus students. Staff must also consider how web presence influences student experience, both positively and negative, and adjust web content and aesthetics accordingly.

### Objectives

**Proposal** – Enhancing the current WMU-Online Education web presence (see Images 1 and 2) by increasing student and instructor support features and revising website content and layout.

**Objectives** – Three main objectives:

- Update website
- Extend support services for online students
- Strengthen instructor support services

**Expected Outcomes** – Improving web presence and support services will improve the academic experience of online students while helping WMU attract and retain online learners and stay relevant in an evolving educational landscape.

### Online Student Profile

**Characteristics of Online Students**

- Motivated by career advancement
- Working full-time
- Enrolled part-time
- Twenty six years of age or older
- May have dependents other than spouse
- Non-traditional enrollment patterns

**Values of Online Students**

- Affordability
- Ease of transfer
- Quick progression to completion
- Informatives and attractive website
- Accessible student services

### Process

**Phase I**

- Extend basic support services to online students through partnerships with various WMU student services units
- Redevlop instructor support services (e.g., workshops, training materials, Etaching Endorsement Program and training sessions)
- Update student support site and instructor support site

**Phase II**

- Create, distribute, and analyze student needs assessment
- Establish retention benchmarks and continuously track retention numbers
- Consider other services that could be delivered online (e.g., veteran and military services, graduate college, academic advising)

### Student Services

**Tutoring**

- The Academic Resource Center uses peer tutors who work in partnerships with various WMU student services units
- Redevlop instructor support services (e.g., workshops, training materials, Etaching Endorsement Program and training sessions)
- Update student support site and instructor support site

**Phase II**

- Create, distribute, and analyze student needs assessment
- Establish retention benchmarks and continuously track retention numbers
- Consider other services that could be delivered online (e.g., veteran and military services, graduate college, academic advising)

### Website Revisions

**Student Support Site**

- Update graphics and visual components
- Create and include videos of online instructor testimonials and biographies
- Include interactive sample course and online student orientation

**Instructor Support Site**

- Update graphics and visual components
- Create and include videos of online instructor testimonials and biographies (see Image 4)
- Include interactive FAQ-style support content

### References


### Contact Information

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