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Effectiveness of Pacific Adventist University's Academic Support Centre

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Most citizens of Papua New Guinea (PNG) are aware of the benefits of obtaining post-secondary qualifications. Those students who are able to obtain gain enrolment are regarded as very privileged, but the problem is that many of these elite students struggle academically. It is therefore, important that post-secondary institutions provide avenues for students to acquire the necessary academic skills to succeed in their studies. Responding to this problem, Pacific Adventist University (PAU), in Port Moresby, created the 'Learning Centre' with the main focus of providing the necessary academic support that hopefully will lead to improved academic standards. From two questionnaires, the Learning Centre endeavoured to determine if the aims of the Centre were achieved. Data collected seems to indicate that PAU has been successful. Most of the students who have accessed the services of the Learning Centre demonstrated that their semester GPAs and written assignments greatly improved; has a more positive self-esteem and were more confident in their studies. There was strong evidence that with the correct academic support, academically struggling students can develop into critical thinkers and successfully succeed in their studies.

Introduction

Citizens of Papua New Guinea (PNG) are very well aware of the benefits of obtaining post-secondary qualifications, but not all grade 12 school leavers have the opportunity to attend a post-secondary institution and not all enrolled students in post-secondary institutions have the necessary aptitude and academic ability, or the financial resources to satisfactorily complete their studies. Research (Jank, 2010) has shown that those who do not successfully graduate from a post-graduate institution have limited options for employment; many find work is less valued; they have lower earning power; have less wealth creation opportunities; they have reduced access to housing, land, medical care and transport. This lack of employment opportunities often leads to an increase in crime as people struggle to maintain some form of economic independence (Cree, Kay & Steward, 2012).

In PNG, most graduating secondary students aspire to attend a post-secondary institution. These students understand the benefits of graduating with a well-recognised degree. With this goal in mind, most secondary schools are attempting to focus on improving students' academic skills so students have a chance to be accepted to study at post-secondary institution. The problem is two-fold. First, only a small percentage of secondary school graduates are able to access post-secondary institutions. In 2015, 25,200 students graduated from grade 12 but there was only 6,000 available spaces in post-secondary (Kapin, 2015, 24 Dec). The students who were able to obtain a place at university are regarded as very privileged. The remaining student, commonly known as 'drop outs' or 'rejects', have very few opportunities to find satisfactory employment. School has aimed them for post-secondary education, but not prepared them for life in the fast-paced, expensive urban communities or back in rural isolated villages.

But the situation for students who are accepted to study at post-secondary institutions, is not much better. Many of these students face problems in which they were not prepared. Many of

these elite students struggle academically as they often lack the range of literacy and learning skills necessary to succeed in a post-secondary academic environment (UNESCO, 2003). Many students are unable to create logical meaning and organisation out of what they have learnt, while others have not mastered efficient learning methods. One of the most significant disadvantages is that these students have low English literacy skills making it difficult for them to fully comprehend their English speaking lecturers or understand their assigned textbooks and academic journal articles. These academic disadvantages may not be the fault of the students but nevertheless may lead to academic frustration and failure.

Add to the lack of academic, many students lack the necessary social, or emotional reserves to succeed in a learning environment that is no longer teacher directed. The responsibility of learning is directly placed on the students. Family support is necessary for students to succeed in post-secondary institutions. The problem is that many students come from families where parents have little time or desire to monitor their children's learning but when their child fails to achieve the parent's expected academic level, children are publically humiliated. In summary, students who are lucky enough to be enrolled in post-secondary institutions, do not find their academic journey easy.

Responsibility of Universities

It is therefore important that post-secondary institutions must provide avenues for students to acquire the necessary and sustained interpersonal support, academic resources and ongoing guidance (Jolly, Campbell & Perlman, 2004). It is recognised that all forms of counselling, have the potential to transform the student's academic skills, by assisting in improving students' social, emotional and academic skills and creating personal empowerment (Parr & Campbell, 2012, pp. 563-567). It is so important that post-secondary institutions provide ways to reduce these non-academic barriers (Jolly, Campbell & Perlman, 2004). In other words, post-secondary institutions, including universities, are very different from secondary schools. Just the transition from one to the other can unsettle the learning and motivational balance for these students.

The students who are accepted to study at one of the PNG universities, are usually the 'best students of the country.' Most of these students have been the top academic students in their local schools. Many arrive at university with the confidence that they will achieve high marks and succeed in their studies. The problem is that many find the transition to university difficult: some fail a subject or placed on Academic Probations. Letters of Encouragement, in first year, and then Letters of Academic Probation, are a shock to many students. Sometimes their self-confidence is shattered. Often times, there is a sense that these students feel abandoned, inadequate and isolated.

Pacific Adventist University (PAU)'s Academic Support Centre

Rationale for the Centre

Responding to this problem, many universities in PNG have attempted to provide additional coaching and support for the academically struggling students. At Pacific Adventist University (PAU), in Port Moresby, PNG, a new 'Learning Centre' is now operating. The main focus of the Centre is to provide the necessary academic support with the goal of improving students' academic standards and confidence in their learning process. Jacobs (2007) argues that it is

unrealistic to expect students to have gained full control of the conventions of academic language before they arrive at university, so he recommends that during early stages of university life, improving academic literacy skills can be promoted. The idea of the PAU Learning Centre was based on promising results of the Learning Communities pilot at Kingsborough Community College (Bloom & Sommo, 2005), where a small group of instructors and counsellor intentionally developed strategies to support students in their academic journey. This service is free; no cost to any student or faculty who wishes to gain academic support.

Academic Advising is an opportunity to exchange information designed to help students reach their educational and career goals. There is shared responsibility between an adviser and the student. Academic advisers can assist in this process by helping the student understand options, determine resources and, when necessary, identify alternatives. The focus is to provide support with academic writing by understanding the requirements of an assignment, how to structure the assignment, how to proofread and edit the final draft, how to avoid issues of plagiarism and most important how to reference correctly. Successful academic advising is usually conducted by personalised one-on-one consultations.

It was recognised at PAU, that many students who arrive at university are overwhelmed with the learning expectations. The university appointed a long term, highly qualified lecturer to be at the helm of the PAU's Learning Centre (commonly known as 'the Centre'). She, with her trained student mentors, provide academic counselling to undergraduate students, post-graduate students and assist lecturers with their writing and research for publication and presentations. The main focus of the Centre is to support all people on an academic journey; and, ensure success in the PAU educational setting (Kovaleski, 1994). The PAU Learning Centre is physically next to the general counsellor's office. The two support agencies work closely together to provide the necessary assistance to students.

The Learning Centre aims is to provide supplementary work and intervention process. These interventions methods are designed to encourage the students' will to succeed. The idea is to provide students with the necessary academic skills to complete their assignments in a satisfactory and academic manner. As they marks improve, these students should gain sufficient grades to graduate after completing four years of the undergraduate studies, or two years of their post graduate studies.

The Learning Centre is available to all students and faculty every weekday from 8 am to 5 pm. Special arrangements can be made for evening consultations. If a group of students are having a similar problem, small workshops are organised for these students by their assigned mentor. These workshop are specifically focused on a problem area Students obtain an understanding of the issue and use the knowledge to progress further.

Specific Services of the Academic Support Centre

Time Management Skills

It is recognized that many pacific island students have problems with time management. In villages, special occasions start when the organizers of an events are ready, not starting at an assigned time, dictated by a clock. Universities expect students to attend classes at the correct time, organise their own times for study, research, rest and recreation. There are no bells or reminders to students when to change activities. Many students have also arrived from

Secondary schools where time is measured in 40 minutes slots with regular bells to tell the student when to progress to the next appointment. This form of time management is in contrast to universities.

One of the first academic seminars offered by the Learning Centre is on time management issues: how to plan time for researching, writing and editing assignments; how to schedule time for worships, meals and socializing.

Encourage class attendance

The Centre also encourages and urges all students to attend every class. Some students have developed a bad habits at Secondary School in not attending class but reading their friends' class notes. A sure-fire way to receive bad grades is to cut classes. Students not only miss out on course content; they may miss out on study tips and extra credit opportunities. Many lecturers factor in class participation in their final grading.

Non-attendance of a students to class is often reported to Director of the Centre. She encourages the mentor from that student's academic school to visit and encourage the student to attend. If the practice continues, the Director also encourages the students and waits at the door of the classroom to encourage the student to attend. This encouragement has greatly reduced the number of students no attending class.

Provide academic seminars

Each week, the Learning Centre offers academic seminars, usually targeting academic topics that students are currently struggling to understand. The same seminar is conducted twice in a week allowing maximum number of students to attend. Each of the weekly presentations are taken by a senior lecturer, the Director or one of the mentors. Notes are distributed at the beginning of the presentation. Many times, the seminar start with 'What if' scenarios, requiring students to think about a specific academic problem and discuss possible solutions (Bloom, 1956). At the end of the presentation, students are encouraged to ask questions on all academic areas worrying the students. Often the questions veer to other academic topics, which are also answered. Students are encouraged to further discuss their issues and questions when they visit the Centre.

The greatest drawback with the seminars was finding a suitable lecturer hall and a times schedule that suited most students. This was often very difficult. Many students wish to attend the Academic Seminars but sometimes there are timetable clashes.

The regular weekly Academic Seminars cover topics requested by students:

- Time Management and Independent learning
- Fundamentals of Health Living
- How to write a thesis statement and plan the assignment structure around the thesis
- How to do academic researching using electronic data bases
- Referencing skills and assignment formatting
- How to read critically and analytically
- How to overcome common grammatical, spelling and punctuation issues
- Use of common transitional and connecting methods
- Study, revision and memory devises
- Common pronunciation issues in the pacific

Create study groups

The Centre also encourages students to form their own study groups for revision purposes. These regular weekly revision activities encourage students to work through concepts and materials with peers with the goal to clarify content. Success in these groups can also build students' confidence and make them less afraid to speak in class. Additionally, if the whole group does not understand content, it's easier to approach the professor as a unified force. Forming a study group can make life easier while increasing the odds of success on an upcoming exam. There is a sense that this collaborative work provides academic and emotional support for the students. There are times, when study groups ask their appointed mentor to join a group at their first meeting to illustrate how the group dynamics functions.

Basic Lifestyle Issues

It is so important the Centre reinforced the fundamentals of healthy living: eating right, sleeping enough, moderating exercise and being reasonable about the time spent in socialising. Reinforcing these general health issues has reduced the number of times students are sick, miss classes or fall behind in their academic tasks. As a result, students' marks suffer.

It is interesting to note, that the residential deans and the Centre support each other. Both parties encourage students to visit the Centre to discuss courses, subjects, assignments and assessments, life style issues, buying of textbooks and time management. This cooperation is a very helpful partnership.

Peer tutoring

The Learning Centre hires mentors to assist Director in providing academic support to students. These mentors are usually final year students with a high academic record. They have experienced most of the frustration and anxieties that students face when they attend university. The Director provides basic academic counselling skills to these mentors before they start working with their assigned students. With this experience, the mentors become peer tutors and provide appropriate support to academically struggling students. Each mentor is assigned specific students, usually students on Academic Probation. The mentors aim to provide editing, assignment guidance and content revision opportunities for their assigned students. This is a very rewarding experience by both the mentor and the student, especially when the grades of the struggling student show an improvement.

Centre visits

As the Centre is open each day, student mentors or Director are available for students who 'drop-in' for assistance. Often, a student will make an appointment with either a mentor or the Director to discuss a specific issues. Notes and handouts on most of the topics are available for sharing with the students. Each appointment is scheduled for 15 minutes.

Face-to-face interactions personalised help, one-to-one consultations make advising more meaningful for the students (Johnson & Morgan, 2005). Experience has shown that students place great importance on this supportive and caring nature of their relationship (Mottarella, Fritzsche & Cerabino, 2004). If a positive relationship is established, the students frequent the Centre more often.

Students are encouraged to discuss their assignment with their mentor or the Director before attempting the first draft, with the aim to create a strong logical structure through preparation of a detailed outline. The structure becomes an important planning document or road map for the academic writer. It is a way of ensuring a logical and complete structure (What is Effective Academic Writing? 2012). During this process, students learn how to write a thesis statement, plan of essay development, write paragraph topic sentences and how to integrate research into the assignment logically and coherently.

Editing Assistance

One of the most popular services provided by the Centre is editing assistance. Students are encouraged to visit the Centre for help in initial planning, structuring of their assignment. On completing the assignment, next steps involve checking the referencing and editing the final production. Students have two options. The first is to physically bring the assignment to the assigned mentor or Director for suggestions in how to improve the final product. The second options is to send their assignments to the Centre as an email attachment. An electronic copy of the assignment is given to the supporting mentor for initial comments and then the Director adds her suggestions. The assignment may be sent back with the comments attached or, the student is asked to come to the Centre for face-to-face discussion.

The focus of the edit is to look for the integration of ideas and meanings (Lensmire, 2000), and to look for spelling, punctuation, grammar and referencing errors. Every paragraph and sentence is checked to ensure that there is clear communication and no possibility of serious misunderstanding (What is Effective Academic Writing? 2012). This process may involve drafting and redrafting. Even though academic writing follows a set of simple rules, it is the process of thinking and working out the problems and finding the correct words to describe the answer to the assignment. Assistance is provided to help the students avoid ambiguity and ensuring the correct use of concrete, rather than abstract terms. Students are encourages to use meaningful strong verbs to progress their sentences.

If the assignment is returned electronically to the student, the student is expected to make the appropriate changes. Sometimes this redrafting and editing process is undertaken a few times, until the assignment is ready for submission. These multiple drafts, accompanied with lecturer-student consultation and constructive peer feedback can transform average work into a worthwhile contribution. This task may be long and tedious but seeing the transformation is a rewarding process (Ferris, 2003). Students who complete this process, are usually very excited when they receive good marks.

Effectiveness of PAU's Centre

The Learning Centre (LC) has been functioning for two years. At the end of the first year, 2014, all students who visited the Centre were encouraged to email any comments. At the end of the second year, 2015, a questionnaire was sent to 70 fairly regular participants who accessed services provided by the Centre and 42 answered questionnaires were returned. This questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part A was a general question asking the students to state how many times they accessed the services of the Learning Centre. Part B required students to answer 15 questions with a simple yes or no, but there was also space for comments. Part B was a general open-ended question asking the students to suggest extra ways the Centre could assist their academic progress. The answers from the first year' general comments and the

answers from the second year questionnaire have provided and insights in how the Centre has progressed and what changes need to be made for the future.

Feedback on written assignments and essays

Many students send their assignment by email for editorial, structural and formatting comments from their assigned mentor or the Director. The following questions in the questionnaire dealt with issues revolving around feedback on students' assignments.

Q. 1: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you rewrite your essay?* Yes, 34.

Q. 2: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you arrange your ideas in a logical order?* Yes, 34

Q. 3: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you structure your essay?* Yes, 31

Q. 4: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you write in a formal academic way?* Yes, 34

Q. 5: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you check your spelling, grammar and punctuation?* Yes, 34

Q. 6: *Did the Academic Support Centre help you with your referencing?* Yes, 32: **Comments:** "most definitely"

Q. 7: *Did you understand the feedback given by the Academic Support Centre?* Yes, 33; No, 3: **Comments:** "For some I understood, others I did not"; "a bit"; "No really"

Academic seminars

In assessing the value of these academic seminars a question was added to the students' questionnaire.

Q. 13: *Did you attend the regular weekly Academic Seminars organised by the Academic Support Centre?* Yes, 6; No, 10: **Comments:** 'clash with timetable', 'No, not regularly'; "only first semester", "only some-times"

In an informal discussion with some of the students, the main concern revolved around the issue of timetabling. The students expressed the sentiment that they would like to attend the scheduled seminars but they had classes, or science labs scheduled at the time of each of the scheduled seminars.

Centre Visits: Time Allocation

One of the issues that arose from informal discussion with the mentors and the participants, was the amount of time allocated to each visit to the Centre. If the students emailed for an appointment, the Centre allocated 15 minutes for each visit. If students arrived at the Centre without an appointment, the time spent with the students depended upon how much time the mentor had before he/she had to rush to their own class, or the time available between other appointments.

Q. 8: *Did the Academic Support Centre take enough time to explain to you how to revise my assignment?* No, 17: Yes, 20

Q. 9: *Were you satisfied with the amount of time the Academic Support Centre spent with you explaining how to improve your assignment?* Yes, 22; No, 15

General Questions

It was important that the Centre understood if their time and effort was actually making a difference with the students and if the students appreciate the services that have been offered.

Q. 10: *Did you leave the Academic Support Centre with the skills to improve your assignment on your own?* Yes, 34; No, 5, **Comments:** “no enough, not really”

Q. 11: *Do you have more confident in writing future assignments?* Yes, 32; No, 6, **Comments:** Not really, not really, about 50%... not more

A. Q1: *How many times did you access the Academic Support Centre?* 3, 3, 1, 20, 1, 1,3, 2, 3, 6, 1, 1, 5, 4, 2, 6, 3, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 4, 1, 6, 5, 3, 1, 2, 8, 5, 6, 5, 2, 4, 3,

Comments; “more than 5 times”; “more than 5 times”, “did not physically visit the Centre but sent my assignments by email”; sent my assignments by email”; “send assignments by email”, “sent assignments by email”

Q. 12: *Will you continue to access the Academic Support Centre for more assistance?* Yes: all students answered in the positive

Lecturer Recommendation

When the idea of the Centre was first discussed, it was suggested that lecturers also encourage students to visit the Centre, if there is a perception the students is academically struggling. A question was added to the questionnaire to determine if this encouragement from lecturers actually occurred.

Q. 14: *Did your lecturer encourage you to attend the Academic Support Centre?* **Comments:** “Yes”; “Sometimes”

Comments from Students on Academic Probation

One of the main focus areas of the Learning Centre is to assist academically struggling students. Students who are struggling receive a letter from the Academic Office stating their grades are not sufficient to graduate. The letter strongly suggests students attend the Centre to receive individual and constant assistance. The names of these students are also given to the Centre. Each mentor is given a specific smaller list from the complete list to email, visit and encourage their assigned students. The Centre needed to know how many of these Academic Probation students actually accessed the Centre.

Q. 15: *Were you a student on Academic Probation this semester?* Yes, 19; No: 21

Ways to improve the services of the Centre

For the Learning Centre to continue to be relevant to students, it is important that the Centre continues to expand its repertoire of academic skills. A question in the questionnaire asked students for their suggestions. Some the answers, were beyond the scope of the question.

Open Ended Question: *What are some extra ways the Academic Centre can assist your academic progress?* Many students were willing to provide ideas.

Answer 1: Sentence structure, grammar, reference and article review;

Answer 2: I would like the centre to assist in improving spelling;

Answer 3: Note taking during lectures, ways of studying and how to write reports;

Answer 4: Provide sample writings of a good essay or report writing: This can be given to us when we seek assistance. Most of the time, we forgot what was explained to us too easily. A same may help to remind us. I still have problem with style of writing I should use, especially with regards to my field. How do I write as a theologian? This is my biggest problem, help me improve on my grammars

Answer 5: Organise someone from the Science Department to check on our Math Assignments

Answer 6: Continue with the academic seminars; Maybe consider the main parts/topic of the essay writing were most students are lacking in, and conduct seminars according to that, with that assign certain days for certain topics and invite students lacking in that topic to attend the seminar.

Answer 7: I need more help especially in referencing

Answer 8: How to reference the source; How to write the thesis statement; How to write the Topic sentence.' And the performance for this semester is very poor

Answer 9: Continue to organise weekly academic seminar during 1st and 2nd Semester every year; identify the leverage point in students so that it can be addressed to provide strength and opportunity for students to excel in their academic during academic seminars.

Answer 10: Most of the days during the academic seminar this semester I usually had classes, therefore, I request to arrange the seminars to the days were I can have the time to attend.

Answer 11: by conducting seminars and by giving appropriate materials/handouts

Answer 12: Analyse, readings, how to read scholarly articles and how to critically evaluate and write good summary

Answer 13: Providing resources on internet

Answer 14: I need if they can assist me in editing my assignments and searching for information using computer (electronic devices).

Answer 15: Structure of essay and Writing in formal academic way.

Answer 16: Should put more emphasis on grammar mistakes and should take more time in explaining the referencing style

Answer 17: Some of the extra ways they can assist me academic progress is tutoring on how to structure my essays and how to arrange ideas logically

Answer 18: Study the GPAs for students to encourage them how to improve or maintain; Showing the ways and techniques to study: What always affects our study?

Answer 19: Organising extra classes and fortnightly classes with handouts and exercises

Answer 20: For students who are day students, and have class during the periods of the Academic seminar should access the presentation on intranet or Moodle if possible. In that way probation students will still have an idea of the presentation and where to improve as well.

Answer 21: It would be helpful if the Academic Support Centre upload its weekly Academic Seminar notes on intranet or Moodle.

Answer 22: How to do proper referencing and structure essay in a logical way by writing critically and evaluating well

Answer 23: By handing out extra work sheets or exercises every time a student goes to visit the Academic Centre. And by getting the learning outcomes and guidelines of assignments from lecturers who have assigned their students to visit the Academic Centre so that corrections are done consistently and marking or correction is understood by the students.

Answer 24: I think the weekly Academic Seminars should be arranged on Sundays especially in the afternoon. I often wish to attend but unfortunately I could not because within these schedule time, I have to attend classes and missed on that important presentation. Next, the struggling students must be the priority which most of the attention are needed to support them grow academically. Handouts or important notes must be emailed regularly to each individuals. Also, extra time must be scheduled to meet with these students and interview them individually on what might be the factors that affect them academically. That would really help them. Some cannot share their reasons openly because they are shy. With that special class can be held for them and further counselling can be made to encourage them.

Answer 25: I learn more skill on how to formulate the research questions; I also learn how to write using the APA system of writings; I learn a lot on how to write a good reference list, and improve the punctuations use in the sentence writing etc.

Answer 26: I am still having problem with the referencing, and I am also have problem with English, that's why I emailed many times to you for edit my essays. So I am looking forward to see you after exam.

Answer 27: I would probably need some help in using computers or about the internet

Answer 28: It would be nice to have student tutors for each subject available at certain times so we have another option apart from our subject lecturers.

Answer 29: By continue to assist me with my work and comment on my progress on each visit

Answer 30: Academic Centre had assist me in many ways throughout the second half of this semester with all my essay writings, with regards on how to arrange my ideas in a coherent way, how to write topic sentences and paragraphing etc.

Answer 31: Academic support centre truly had helped me a lot, and I will continue to seek help throughout me studies here in this university and may God bless those that are working on this departments as they continue to help student to be are missionary for the Lord.

Answer 32: I would suggest that [you] keep up the good work.

Answer 33: I think the way that Academic Centre assisted me was excellent. I really appreciated it. And I want to come again next time to Academic Centre next year. I also want the Academic Centre to please at least provide me some materials on how to improve my English skills.

Answer 34: Well at the moment I think they are doing enough to help the students but it depends on each individual student to make time to go the Academic Seminar and seek help.

Answer 35: I am very pleased with everything that the Learning and Academic Centre have provided for us this semester that I do not know what else to suggest.

Student 36: Learning and academic support centre was a brilliant realization that helped guide and support in rendering to students' outstanding academic as well as counselling services that proved very effective and efficient to those who become frequent users of the centre. I personally thank and congratulate the learning and academic support centre coordinator Dr Jillian Thiele and the team for the outstanding enactment in providing best academic support to students. Thank you."

Student 37: I want say thank you for assisting me in my major project paper which has many grammatical errors and etc... but I want thank the Academic Support Centre for helping me out with my major projects. Thank you very and I pray that God will continue to bless this centre

as you will continue to minister in this special work to help the students who are struggling like me.

Student 38: Honestly speaking, I was benefited from the service of the academic support centre. There is no doubt that if student rely by using the centre, their academic performance will be improved. Therefore, I have no hesitation to recommend the centre to continue on next year and onwards. Thank you Dr Jillian for such great support.

Student 39: This Academic Support Center is very useful. I wish it started in 2011 when I came as first year and now I am final year and am about to leave. However, I would like to recommend this centre as very helpful to students who are struggling. I personally went and seek assistance regarding my assignment question and to be honest, after following the advice I wrote the best assignment paper which my lecturer commended me for the flow of assignment and other elements of the assignments. I got the highest mark for this assignment than my colleagues. Thus, I recommend this Academic Support Center to continue and help as much student as possible. Thanks and God continue to bless those who involves in helping other students

Students 40: The centre was very helpful to me because I did not complete or follow the normal education system in PNG. I was a grade 10 lever but have learnt much through the centre. Thanks a million times

Student 41: My thesis would not have been near perfect in terms of grammar and structure, if it wasn't for the academic support centre, especially the person driving it!! Thank you PAU for creating this centre and thank you Jillian for support you provide!

Students 42: The Academic Support Centre is indeed a great pleasure and privilege to have a centre like that to be able to run to for help and support academically and in able to improve in academic writing effectively and to the standard and I do prefer or would like that the Academic Support Centre to continue next year in helping new students out who come to PAU. Thank You

Student 43: Thank you Dr Jillian Thiele for the extra classes in the afternoon in learning how to understand and write essays and everything about English writing. It has been a blessing and I really appreciated it. It has helped in my essay writing and understanding questions. I only wish I had attended this kind of classes last year, but am happy I did this year. Thank you for your assistance and great smile. You are an inspiration.

Post Graduate Student' Response

The Director of the Centre provided individual support for the postgraduate students. She has a close relationship with many of these students, as she taught them in their under-graduate studies.

Student: From postgraduate studies department, we have immensely benefited from the Academic Support Centre. You have provided various forms of support to postgraduate students, in terms of conducting some classes and providing editorial support with their theses. For this we are grateful. This centre provides a very vital service to this institution's academic environment. PAU is growing and I can't imagine it not having an academic support centre. I believe many students have benefited from this centre since beginning of this year. And I believe this service can be sustained into the future with more support from the administration

in terms of allocating good physical space and more other resources for the centre. I thank the Lord for your commitment in serving through this centre and pray that HE will continue to lead and bless your work as you help each student who seek help from your office.

How to improve the services of the Academic Support Centre

At the beginning of the third year, the Academic Support Centre created some changes. First, there was a name change: from the Learning and Academic Support Centre to the Learning Centre. Secondly, other changes came as a result of the detailed analyses of the comments provided by the students.

Extend the time with individual students

By examining the comments provided, it seems as though the Centre needs to allocate more time for each individual student visit. Maybe, 15 minutes is not long enough for students to really understand a complex concept. During 2016, the Centre will allocate 30 minutes per student for rearranged appointments.

Encourage visit to Centre upon return of edited assignment

When students send their essays to be edited, instead of sending the assignment back as an attachment with suggestions of how to improve the assignments, students will be encouraged to visit the Centre to retrieve their assignments. At the retrieval stages, explanations will be discussed with the students. Hopefully, this will overcome the issue of misunderstanding some of the suggestions given in regards to grammar, formatting and referencing improvements.

Evening Opening Hours

Due to students' very busy timetables, the Learning Centre will attempt to open the Centre in the evenings. One or two of the male mentors will be assigned hours to work at night. For security issues, if female students would like assistance, they must come in groups. A university hired security officer will pass the Centre every 20 minutes to ensure the safety of the mentor and the visiting students.

Academic Seminars

Timetabling appropriate times, venue, and presenters for the biweekly Academic Seminars is difficult. The registrar's office completes the timetable and then any available venues and time slots are made available for the Centre. Due to the increase in student numbers, all large venues are used throughout the day. It is very difficult to find a time that would suit the majority of students. Another factor to consider is the increased number of day students. Approximately 30% of students now live in Port Moresby and travel by bus to the university. The buses leave the campus at 5. There are no buses on the weekend. The Director also has a complex timetable as she has regular meeting to attend, and assists in teaching units for other lecturers. There are no easy solutions to the timetabling of twice weekly Academic Seminars. The Director of the Centre, continues to work with the registrar's office for suitable times and venues.

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Encourage lecturers to recommend struggling students

From past experience, it has shown that when a lecturer has a concern regarding an individual student, the most productive method is for the lecturer to personally bring the students to the Centre to be introduced to the Director and the mentors. During Faculty Orientation, early in 2016, the Director reinforced this role to the lecturers. If a lecturer senses a student is not actively participating in class discussions, has a high absentee class rate, or their assignments are poorly completed, then the Centre needs to be contacted. With the assigned mentors, the Director and the lecturer showing some interest in a student's academic journey, then there is a sense of accountability by the students to improve their academic performance.

Conclusion

From comments, it seems as the established Learning Centre has provided an avenue for transformative change (Potter, 2014). Destructive behaviours and attitudes can be changed to achieve positive outcomes. In this way, academic support leads to greater productivity in the learning process; makes learning goals feel attainable, and importantly, leads students to have feelings of empowerment and hope. As appropriate academic skills are learnt and applied, students have a great sense of independence and empowerment. Previous 'learned helplessness' is overcome. Students have a most positive self-esteem. There is a sense that students develop into critical thinkers. Just as literacy offers people the freedom to explore their world and participate in it more fully, so does an educated person. Just as literacy is a human right, so is education. Educated people usually become prosperous, socially aware and contributing members of their communities. No nation can relax as long as significant number of citizens cannot assess education; so no university can relax if they cannot provide an academic pathways for their students to succeed.

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