Date: April 10, 2016
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Subject: Recommendation Report for Informing Students of Running Start

Attached is the report for our study: "Informing Students of Running Start: A Recommendation Report". We have completed the tasks described in the proposal of February 28, 2016 which include understand the current delivery methods, assess the timeframe in which the information is delivered, research the steps needed to occur after the initial information is provided to the student in order for them to enroll in Running Start, and evaluate the levels of responsibility placed on each party in terms of what is required to enroll in the Running Start program.

To perform these tasks, we conducted primary and secondary research. We studied the various ways that a student can be introduced to the Running Start program, evaluated the timeframe that students received specific information by asking students questions, researched what was required to enter the program, and calculated the levels of responsibility for a student, parent, and high school counselor by speaking to individuals involved.

Our main findings were that the main form of delivery of the information to students and parents was through word of mouth from other students, family members or parents of students that utilize the program. Online websites seem to have a great deal of information, but it is not reaching the student. The timeframes of the delivery of the information was entirely dependent on the delivery method. Word of mouth reached students quicker than all other methods. It was found that not all students and parents were following the enrollment process as efficient as they could. The enrollment process and the steps followed were dependent on the amount of interaction with the school counselors and the amount of personal research and time spent by the students and parents. The levels of responsibility were not where they were intended to be throughout the process of enrollment, and parent involvement in the process was typically more than required. It was apparent that a brochure that included information about the program and the process of enrollment was needed and would provide needed guidance to students, parents, and high school counselors.

We recommend that an informational brochure about the Running Start program (see Appendix 1) should be available to the student in all high schools in order to ensure the greatest knowledge of the program and involvement/enrollment of eligible students into the Running Start program. This brochure should be made available through the high school to both students and parents, through parent-teacher conferences, informational presentations, and in high school counselling offices.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this study about how to best inform students of the Running Start program, and we look forward to working with you on any follow-up activities. If you have any questions or comments; please contact Allison Freed at allison.freed1@gmail.com, Chris Gregg at chris.gregg@wsu.edu, Dan Cai at dan.cai@wsu.edu, Heather Boley at heather.boley@wsu.edu, or Shad Birkholz, at shad.birkholz@wsu.edu.

Informing Students of Running Start:
A Recommendation Report

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Executive Summary

  The objective of the research project is to develop a trifold brochure incorporating diverse information regarding Running Start program. The research project defines the Running Start program as an opportunity for the eligible high school juniors and seniors in Washington State to take college-level classes without paying tuition fee. Similarly, the brochure incorporates benefits of undertaking the courses under this program. According to the findings of the research project, Running Start program enables students to obtain credits at both college and high school levels, thus, a platform for accelerating their pursuit of educational goals and targets. Moreover, Running Start program enables students to obtain college credit at an affordable cost. Students and their parents have the obligation of procuring their learning materials, as well as incurring transportation costs rather than the tuition fee, which is a responsibility of the state government. The program enhances flexibility in the creation of schedules, which are highly convenient for the students. From this perspective, students have the opportunity to obtain or secure part-time jobs while engaging in other sporting activities, thus, holistic development in the educational sector. Another benefit from this research project is the potentiality of students experiencing new learning environment, which is different from the high school environment. The research project does incorporate information on the eligibility for the courses under this program, potential costs, and enrollment roadmap. These components are valuable in enhancing understanding of the Running Start program in the context of Washington State.

Introduction

The Running Start program refers to an opportunity for the eligible high school juniors and seniors in Washington State to take college-level classes without paying tuition fee. The program enables students to earn dual credits. From this perspective, high school juniors and seniors have the opportunity to earn both high school and college credits, which are applicable towards high school graduation, as well as an associate's degree and certificate. The credits are also transferable. Running Start program is available to the high school juniors and seniors during fall, winter, and spring quarters. Similarly, the program is valuable in enabling the eligible students to learn within the college setting. In such setting, high school juniors and seniors have the platform to choose their favorite courses from the hundreds of different classes. The approach is valuable in enhancing flexibility in the scheduling. Besides, Running Start generates the opportunity for the students to opt to take classes at the high school and college or solely engage in the college classes. The program came into being under the influence of legislative arm of the government as a component of the 1990 parent and student learning by Choice legislation.

Running Start program enables students in grades 11 and 12 to pursue college courses in diverse institutions and community facilities in the context of Washington State. In the statement mentioned above, students in this program, as well as their families do not pay tuition fees (Markel, 2015). Nevertheless, such students have the obligation to pay school fees, as well as purchase books and other learning materials. Besides, such students provide for their transportation costs. The tendency by the program to enable the students to receive both high school and college credit for the classes is essential in the acceleration of the progress of the learners in pursuit of educational goals in the education system. The qualification of students to the program is subject to minimal eligibility, as well as procedural requirements in agreement with the state administrative rules. Washington State provides the opportunity for high school junior and senior students to pursue Running Start program in 34 communities, as well as technical colleges.

Running Start program associates with enhanced flexibility in pursuit of educational goals and targets in the school system. For instance, students have the opportunity to take high school and college courses on a part-time basis. On the other hand, the eligible students have the ability and capacity to engage specifically in the college courses, thus, the essence of full-time schedules. The objective of the Washington State is to improve the level of education within the state; thus, the approach to funding the Running Start program fully.

From the above illustration, Running Start program is an important component that enables students to accelerate the progress of their educational journey in the educational system. In spite of these developments, there are still issues surrounding the program, which calls for execution of the research to address these issues. The development of the research project on the Running Start brochure aims at solving or providing workable solutions to address the problems. One of the critical issues surrounding this program is the lack of program advertisement (Markel, 2015). Not every student is aware of the program and eligibility to take courses under this program because of ineffective marketing or advertising. Execution of this research project will be vital in the generation of the brochures to facilitate the improvement of the awareness of the students and their families on the program.

Secondly, students and parents do not understand the benefits of the courses under this program. Similarly, the research project will seek to incorporate benefits of the Running Start program in the brochure to enable students and their families to have enhanced understanding of

the courses in this program. Understanding the benefits of this program will increase the number of students seeking to enroll in the Running Start program to have the platform to receive credits at both high school and college levels.

Additionally, the research project will offer more support to the students seeking to enroll in the program through improving their awareness on issues such as eligibility and available courses at their disposal to fast track their educational process. The research project targets both parents and students to create a platform, which would initiate conversation relating to the students taking part in the Running Start program. The trifold brochure will incorporate necessary steps to enable students to enroll in the program. Students will have the opportunity to utilize the brochure from this research project to understand eligibility for the enrollment, as well as potential costs while pursuing courses under this program.

Research Methods

As we began to think about our research, we felt that it was necessary to approach this topic from the viewpoint of both the student and the parent. Specifically, we wanted to evaluate what information was likely to be presented to each group as well as what information was readily available. After making these distinctions regarding the various groups and information channels we were interested in, we started with what was likely to be presented to both parents and students. Some group members have had experience with the program and were our starting point for understanding how they, or any student, initially heard of the program. Each of the group members that participated in Running Start had done so via a different high school. Through discussion with these group members we quickly realized that every school approached the subject a little differently, although similar enough that we felt comfortable with a sample from a single school.

Task 1: Interview current Running Students

Next, we began the process of identifying students that were currently enrolled in the program that we could interview. Speaking with current students allowed us to understand the various ways students hear of the program in addition to those that our group members had already shared. These interviews also provided us with an opportunity to ask the students what their current understanding of the program and its benefits were. Doing so was an important step in not only evaluating the means of communicating program information to student, but to the accuracy and clarity of the information that was being communicated.

Task 2: Interview the parents of Running Start Students

Following our interviews with students we moved onto speaking with the parents of those students and/or the parents of students that were enrolled in Running Start. Our goal was again to understand the typical information delivery path regarding Running Start existence and benefit. Interviewing parents was an important step because it is often the parent that will start the conversation with their student about and desire to enroll in Running Start. Without parent interaction many potential Running Start students would likely not get enrolled in the program.

Task 3: Conduct Internet Research

Finally, after completing our interviews we moved onto research the program on the internet. For a student or parent that simply heard of the existence of the program, searching the internet would be a likely next step to learn more. During this research we focused on three areas of searching for information. The first source was the high school website of the students that we had interviewed. This allowed us to understand what information the high school was putting out, and what the high school students were most likely to receive. Next, we moved on to the website of the community college that the students attended for Running Start. This would again be a major source of information for a student or parent that had heard of Running Start and contacted the community college for additional information. Our final source was a standard google search. Even with specific information provided by the school, it was important for us to understand at the state level what information was provided.

Results

Conducting the research for this project was a fun experience. We were able to interview 12 students who are currently enrolled in the program. Of those 12 students, we were able to contact 5 of the parents for interviews as well. Following the interviews, the next step was to look online for available resources on the Running Start Program. .

Task 1: Interview current Running Students

The majority of the students that we interviewed shared that they had gotten the initial Running Start information from friends participating in the program or other family members. The current students provided feedback about the success of the program and shared experiences. Many of the students understood the program and the benefit. Some even bragged that they will graduate with both a high school diploma and an AA degree at the same time.

Task 2: Interview the parents of Running Start Students

Many parents encourage their kids to enroll in the running start program for a number of reasons. They like that is greatly reduces the higher education expenses of their kids, which can potentially reduce student loan debt in the long run. Some may argue that students will miss out of valuable experiences that high school offers, such as participating in sports programs or clubs. Students should still be able to participate in all high school programs because they are still enrolled through the school

Task 3: Conduct Internet Research

There is a lot of online information on the program. The issue with this is that students would need to know what they are looking for when looking online. There are websites dedicated the Running Start program. The state website does a wonderful job of illustrating the deadlines for each year, the requirements, what to expect, and has an abundance of resources. Many of the local participating community colleges also have pages with details about the program.

Conclusions

        The running start program has a lot of available information and resources on line; however, information may not be as accessible in high schools. Because the schools do not all share the information the same, the majority of students and parents who participated in the Running Start Program had discovered it through word of mouth from peers, friends, and family. The other method that students would learn of this program is through the online research. The issue with having the information available online is that students would need to know that the program is available on order to know what to research online. Therefore, a brochure (see Appendix 1) would be the most effective and efficient way of providing the information to both parents and students so that they would be able to make timely and informed decisions on the program. This may also encourage more students to consider enrolling in the program.

Recommendation

The Running Start Program is a wonderful opportunity for students who would take the opportunity to get more out of their education. If a student doesn't know that this program is out there, then they could miss out on this opportunity.

Option 1: Circulate the brochure to schools

This option allows students the chance to discover the Running Start program on their own. If we are able to circulate this brochure to students in high school, then they can read about the program and how to enroll. This brochure would need to be delivered at the beginning of the school year with a second drop just after the winter break to all grades in the high schools. It will be available in the counseling center of the high school, at parent-teacher events, during student orientation, and delivered during other school events. This would provide the information in time for the students to prepare for the program before the enrollment deadlines. The brochure is included in the appendix of this report. It is highly visible, attractive, and an easily read resource that provides enough information for students to understand the program without overwhelming them with information.

Option 2: Include the brochure in student correspondence to parents

This option will involve the students and the parents. We will deliver the brochures to the schools in the same manner as in option number one, but take it a step further. It is important that parents also understand the benefits of this program. This recommendation is to include the Running Start program brochure when sending newsletters or school related information to parents through mail or email. This gives the parents the chance to review the program benefits and help to encourage the students to join the program.

Appendix

This is the brochure that we have created for the Running Start Program

Running Start Program

Why Running Start?

1. Two years of tuition free college credit
2. Take more advanced college courses in place of high school courses
3. Extremely flexible scheduling
4. Materials are covered in condensed 11-week courses rather than year long high school courses
5. Great social and networking opportunities
7. Class available online and in person at multiple community colleges throughout the state and also through a select few four year universities.

Why Choose Us?

You may enjoy this program if

- You are excited about your education and being academically challenged
- You consider yourself mature and are interested in growing in an adult environment
- You respect and enjoy communication with people from various cultures and lifestyles
- You are interested in spending less time in the classroom and more time studying
- You can also choose to earn your Associates Degree and earn a high school diploma at the same that is issued by the community college

Financial Responsibilities

- Transportation to and from the college campus
- Class fees, student fees, and parking
- Books and school supplies
- There are no tuition fees; however, students (or their parents) must pay any college fees

Running Start vs. AP Program

- Both programs earn college credit that can be transferred to a 4-year institution
- AP classes are taken at the high school while Running Start course are taken either online or at the college
- The AP Program awards college credit upon passing an exam at the end of the year
- Running Start awards both high school and college credit upon successful completion of the course
- A full time AP student can earn 30 college credits in a single year
- A full time Running Start student can earn 45 college credits in a single year

RUNNING START
Earn College Credit in High School!

Things to Consider

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): no information can be released, even to parents, without the student's written consent
- Transportation and parking, both time and associated costs
- College schedules differ from high school schedules

Required Steps

1. Must be at least 16 years of age upon enrollment, or turn 16 within the first quarter of enrollment
Must meet minimum scores on COMPASS (reading and either writing or math)
Meet the registration deadlines! Cannot register for a quarter if you miss the deadline.
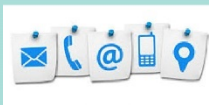2. Junior or Senior class standing
3. Test into English 101

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Can I participate as a homeschooled student?
-Yes, you may access the program through the public home school network, your local high school, or district in order to receive the tuition benefits.
2. Do all Running Start credits transfer to 4-year institutions?
-Universities in Washington State typically accept any college level course taken through Running Start
-You are encouraged to ask the 4-year institution directly as each has varying policies

Things to Consider

- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): no information can be released, even to parents, without the student's written consent
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