Penn State 2025: Executive Committee

Background for Guiding Principle 1: Provide a Seamless Student Experience.

In 2025, Penn State will provide students with a seamless, mobile student experience in all student interactions with the institution, whether this be the admissions or enrollment processes, the process of taking courses, co-curricular learning, or full access to the curricula and support services offered across the University.

Integrating Higher Education Student Services is a predominate topic among institutions as well as Higher-Ed Consulting/Software companies (no endorsements implied). Implementation of this ideal varies widely by institution, both in philosophy and scope.

One focus of these endeavors is on “One-Stop” student Service Centers.

In Modern One-Stop Student Service Centers Transform the Student Experience by Ellucian the author points out that:

- Students’ frustration is often centered around critical administrative tasks such as: bill payment, financial aid reconciliation, course registration, mandatory advising check-ins, and transcript or credential requests.
- The emergence of “One Stop” centers, both physical and virtual, are evidence of institutions’ recognizing the changing needs and habits of today’s students. One stop centers allow students to manage all their business tasks in one location, somewhat mirroring the process of managing tasks in industries outside of higher education.
- A one stop center moves services from a process-centered approach to a student-centered approach and reduces the runaround students often experience as they navigate the business of college life.
- Today’s learner is also an online consumer and, as such, has an expectation that the business functions of their college or university should be made available to them online. Thus, they believe they should also be able to log on to their institution’s site (or mobile app) and request a transcript or other academic credential in much the same way. Students instinctively turn to the web to find answers to their questions. Providing a centralized virtual space for them to seek assistance allows/encourages independence in problem-solving as well as saving time and resources for both students and institutions.
- Finally, the set-up of a one stop provides an ideal opportunity for institutions to review and improve systems that may be archaic or out of date.

In a follow-up article, the author details the process of implementing a One-Stop Student Service center and focuses on the University of Tennessee (presumably a client, see link in “Examples” section). Some key take-aways from the article are:

- One-stop centers improve efficiency and the student experience and can function as a powerful recruiting and retention tool.
- Students’ ability to navigate complex administrative processes should not be the factor that determines whether they stay happily enrolled at their current institution or seek enrollment elsewhere.
- In the first year of service, the University of Tennessee’s One-Stop saw 72% reduction of calls routed to the Bursar; 74% reduction of calls routed to the Financial Aid; and an 85% reduction of calls routed to the Registrar.
- UT One Stop handled over 230,000 service requests, by email, phone, and walk-in customers—nearly 90% of which came by just phone and email. And the center received satisfaction scores of 90% or above on its recent survey measuring professionalism, courtesy, and “received answer needed.”
- The University of Tennessee also saw considerable cost-savings in the form of improved staff utilization: approximately 20% of frontline staff time that was previously idle during down times is now flexed for persistence initiatives.
- The article goes on to discuss the implementation with Darren Curry, Director of One-Stop Student Services at UT (many interesting insights).

(https://www.ellucian.com/insights/how-implement-modern-one-stop-student-service-center)

The Chronical of Higher Education (One-Stop Shops for Student Services Aim to Eliminate Hassle) details the Virginia Commonwealth University’s efforts to combine the student interface for the offices of records and registration, student accounts, and financial aid into a single entity, staffed by "generalists" knowledgeable about a wide range of student services.

Salient points of the article include:

- Dividing the registration, bursar, and financial-aid functions of a university into discrete units might make sense to staff but not to students. And if the point is to help students, services ought to be organized with their needs in mind, not the habits of the institution.
- Julie Selander, interim director of Minnesota’s one-stop student services effort (see Examples section) notes that, "The silo way of doing things creates that runaround for students, and students are frustrated."
- Such centers have been credited with a school’s improvement in student retention.
- One-Stop staffers can be moved from frontline positions in key offices and cross-trained to address a wider range of questions, policies and procedures.
- One risk in combining customer-service staffs might be that although no one's in the wrong line, that line could be terribly long, causing just the sort of frustration that the centers were
designed to eliminate. (Hence the necessity for effective online/mobile service centers in addition to in-person venues... which still serve an important function, especially for dealing with more complex student problems.)

- While One-Stop centers can handle a variety of tasks, they cannot be expected to handle all tasks, something that may out of sync with student expectations. Expectation management (for students) is key to clearly articulate what such centers can and can’t do.

(https://www.chronicle.com/article/One-Stop-Shops-for-Student/130069) The comments to this article are an interesting read as well.

Technology must play a role in centralizing student services. In a 2017 survey conducted by Wakefield Research, students were asked about expectations of their technology experience outside the classroom. Results found that:

- Just like any other mobile application or service they have grown up with, students demand a personalized experience that will help them adjust to their new surroundings, optimize their life on campus and connect more deeply with their school experience.

- While most students (85 percent) claim their school has a centralized application, on average students must log-in to four different platforms to access college-related information or activities. Larger schools, those with more than 15,000 students, have even more platforms students need to access, with 1 in 4 students logging into five or more platforms.

- 58% of students reporting that of all the companies or entities they engage with, their college is the furthest behind in personalizing their experience.

- 68 percent of students whose college offers a centralized campus app were “overwhelmed” by the volume of information their college provided when they first started their higher education journey. When no app was offered, 85 percent of students believe it would have made the transition to college easier as well as increased their participation in student organizations.

- The study also found that students most want to see data-driven personalization for: Career preparation (29%), Tuition and Financial Aid (28%), Academic Matters (25%), and Student Life (18%).


In Six Strategies forConnecting Student Service Silos, Adam Griff of Britespot states that “Student needs are increasingly complex and cut across the typical silos of student services.” Meanwhile, new student cohorts have brought their consumer experiences and higher expectations into their educational life. They expect a cohesive, seamless, personalized experience (emphasis added) at every online and in-person interaction, providing information and support how and when they want it. He suggests six strategies for connecting student services:

- Create an Integrated Student Guide Across All Service Areas
• Focus Your Service Portfolio on the Holistic Student Experience
• Unify Service Points to Resolve “Student Shuffle”
• Adjust Operating Hours to Fit Student Life
• Align Your Core Value and Philosophy with Your Integrated Approach
• Deliver Academic Services from the Student Perspective

(https://www.brightspotstrategy.com/higher-education-student-services-integration/)

Among many of the trends mentioned in aligned student services, many articles mentioned the necessity for all services to be mobile friendly. An infographic by TargetX, Why Mobile Matters, presents some surprising statistics about mobile platform use by students:

• 97% undergrads own a cell phone.
• 83% of mobile users say that a seamless experience across all devices is important.
• 80% of students visit college websites on their mobile devices.
• 76% indicate the experience was “just OK”, or worse, “challenging”


Examples:

There are many examples of integrates Student Service portals. Here are three from peer institutions that are readily viewable and incorporate (in my view) ideals from the articles above.

OneIU (https://one.iu.edu/)

This is a fantastic site... not intimidating, mobile friendly, excellent (real-language searching), create favorites, task centers with common apps, etc. Many of the “next steps” are behind a login, but this is a great start page.

University of Tennessee One-Stop Student Services (https://onestop.utk.edu)

Another nice portal page. Not as flexible or intuitive as IU but can access sites quickly. No plain language search feature.

University of Minnesota “One Stop” (https://onestop.umn.edu/)

Fairly intuitive interface, mobile-friendly (but not as much as IU). Provides simple instructions on how to complete tasks. Search could be better.