



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ADVISING ADULT LEARNERS CROSS-COUNTRY STYLE

Adult students are returning to school in record numbers. Determined and dedicated, these individuals are either “self-directed” students who know what they want to do and how to get there, or “undecided students” who want to continue their education, but lack direction or focus. For the latter, a counseling strategy that includes self-, career-, and institution-exploration is key. This search includes identifying careers/occupations of interest to the student and matching those occupations’ responsibilities and tasks to the individual student’s personal interests and styles. The third leg of this process begins with identifying an institution that can best fit an individual’s personal, academic needs. This three-step process is never really complete as students may need to hit “restart” a few times and begin the process again until they can hone in on who they are and what they would like to do. Here’s where a professional advisor comes into the mix. What these “undecided students” need is someone to keep them on track, motivated, and encouraged. In this regard, College Coach was hired by our client company.

Services

Different from traditional college services, College Coach (www.getintocollege.com) is a private educational consulting company, providing employees of corporate clients with the advising services of more than 25 expert professionals in selecting, applying to, and financing higher education. College Coach services are offered to corporate clients’ employees as part of a work/life benefit, much like childcare and eldercare services. Workshops, one-on-one counseling, and Help Desk services are available to clients in all of the above. The College Coach Virtual Learning Center can be made available to all corporate clients’ employees where workshops are offered via streaming video. Topic-specific resources and additional information are available on the website; employees who may not be able to attend onsite workshop presentations may view the presentations at a more convenient time. Prospective students

can schedule one-on-one appointments to speak with our advisors or register for the onsite workshops using online scheduling.

The Problem

One of our client companies offers a work/life benefit of tuition assistance to over 20,000 eligible employees. Over time, this client has found it necessary to downsize its employee base. To support the employees who are no longer essential to the company, and in order to maintain a qualified, satisfied workforce, the company created a partnership with the union to provide full tuition and fee coverage to any employee who meets the eligibility standard.

While this benefit has been available to employees for years, the client company recognized that many employees had been provided little or no direction and support in transitioning to higher education. Most of the employees who take advantage of this benefit never thought about continuing their education once they graduated high school. In order to keep up with an ever-changing technological workforce, current employees need to train or re-train continually to keep current with licensure and certifications, and maintain their marketability. To assist eligible employees in continuing their education, College Coach’s advisors provide unlimited career counseling and pre-college advising services. Through our telephone, email, and website delivery, College Coach advisors speak with individuals about their interests and abilities, choices of colleges, or training (from basic GED/ESL to vocational/technical training, and two-/four-year institutions, and graduate school) in all programs covering more than 15 states. All counseling is performed via a three-pronged approach:

Component 1: The Virtual Learning Center (streaming video).

- Exploring Academic Opportunities—General
- Exploring Academic Opportunities—Business
- Exploring Academic Opportunities—Information Technology
- Exploring Academic Opportunities—Telecommunications

These four introductory programs present available educational options, providing the necessary steps for



students to understand themselves better, identify possible career paths, and learn about educational options. Learning how to combine interests with the requirements and responsibilities of a career assists students in identifying educational programs and courses they will enjoy. They discover how earning a certificate or degree can increase their chances to grow financially, gain valuable experience, and open doors to greater career opportunities.

Component 2: Advisor to Student Contact. First-level advising begins with Help Desk support—quick questions answered through our telephone services. Individuals may call the Help Desk line at their convenience and either receive answers immediately or schedule an appointment.

Component 3: Advisor to Student Contact. In-depth advising begins at this point. Individuals may schedule a one-on-one appointment by phone or website, and choose convenient dates and times. Our advisors will contact them by telephone to schedule 45-minute appointments for answering questions about institutions, admissions, financial aid, programs, and courses.

Method

All of our students live in the western United States, and the likelihood of meeting most of them is remote. Each month, our Director of Continuing Education travels to client locations, delivers a formal presentation on Exploring Academic Opportunities, followed by personalized one-on-one counseling sessions at each on-site location.

At the same time the Director is visiting off-site locations, full-time advisors at our home office are conducting one-on-one counseling sessions, and our Help Desk is answering quick questions and scheduling appointments. Each advisor can meet and answer questions for upwards of 25 students per day through scheduled one-on-one 45-minute appointments or drop-in calls or emails.

Each employee is allowed unlimited use of the Virtual Learning Center and its resources, the Help Desk, and an unlimited number of 45-minute advising sessions. An employee can log on to the website and locate our webpage, view all services provided by College Coach, and then either call our Help Desk to schedule an appointment or log on to our automated registration web program and schedule a 45-minute counseling session. On the day of the counseling session, the advisor contacts the employee by telephone and answers all questions, creates education plans, and discusses career options. If an employee has questions that cannot be answered by the advisor, the session will end, and the advisor will research the answers. Once sufficiently pleased with the results of the research, the advisor will

contact the employee either by email or phone, and provide the results.

Throughout this entire process, advisors act as advocates for the employee/student regarding college admissions, registration, programming issues, courses, tuition assistance, or career selection.

Student Responsibilities

Once individuals complete sessions with the College Coach advisor, they are free to apply for tuition assistance at their respective companies and/or return to the College Coach for additional assistance.

- Employees can log on to the company-wide website using their designated ID number and
 - o Apply for a tuition voucher/reimbursement
 - o Order a textbook/reimbursement
 - o Check their financial spending history
 - o Contact the tuition assistance administrators with questions
 - o Click on the College Coach Logo for Continuing Education assistance—to access the Virtual Learning Center, the Help Desk, or request one-on-one consulting.

Advisor Training

Training for new advisors has been accomplished through on-the-job mentoring. A new advisor is provided the handbook from each client company and is required to learn about the tuition assistance available to the employee. Once on board with the information from each company, the advisor will be assigned four scheduled appointments per day and help each scheduled appointment via telephone. In between scheduled appointments (if there is time), advisors will take drop-in calls, following the process developed for scheduled appointments.

Each advisor is responsible for learning about programs from all educational institutions located in over 20 states to assist prospective students—a time-consuming process. Once the advisor has created the list of colleges in the physical company area, information is shared with other advisors.

Future Considerations

All curriculum materials and streaming video presentations were designed to meet client needs and assist individuals through the process. Our College Coach staff has designed curricula that provide current, timely information that can be understood and used easily by adult learners at a distance.

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