ADA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CAPSTONE PROJECT SUBMITTED IN THE ROLE OF STUDENT SERVICES IN

FRESHMEN'S ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AT AZERBAIJAN PUBLIC

UNIVERSITIES

Exploring The Role of Student Services in Freshmen's Academic Development at

Azerbaijan State Universities

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STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

We have read ADA's policy on plagiarism and certify that, to the best of our knowledge, the content of this Capstone project, entitled (Exploring The Role of Student Services in Freshmen's Academic Development at Azerbaijan State Universities), is all our work and does not contain any unacknowledged work.

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Abstract

Exploring The Role of Student Services in Freshmen's Academic Development at Azerbaijan

State Universities

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ADA UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF ARTS CAPSTONE PROJECT 2022

This study aims to explore student services in three public universities in Azerbaijan and investigate freshmen's perceptions of student services; to find out the roles and responsibilities of student services administration and representatives; to determine the structure of student services in public universities; to identify freshmen's perception of student services ; to contribute to the academic development of freshmen in public universities. Since Student services is new for Azerbaijan HEIs, the desired level of research has not been conducted in the literature. In this sense, it is considered important to add the deficiencies of the research in the literature. This research is important in terms of contributing to the theory and practice of student services that might be required in the Azerbaijani context.

The study's target population and sample size consist of three student services representatives, three tutors, and nine freshmen. For the primary data collection, semi-structured interviews were utilized. We student services were not functioning as a unified department to support freshmen, rather they were still emerging as a structure within educational entities, according to research findings. The collected data and data analysis revealed that student services representatives and tutors in each respected university assumed responsibility for assisting students with their academic needs. Student services, in the eyes of incoming freshmen, is

the department that helps them achieve academic success.

Keywords: student services, public universities, academic development, freshmen.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Student success in current higher education (HE) depends on how much support students receive from first contact through to becoming alumni. Students' experience such as academic, social, welfare and support, is enhanced by student services which is usually a division or department in higher education institutions (HEIs). The way student services operate and are organized differs from one country to the next (Cibanu, 2013). Furthermore, there are two forms of student services that assist students throughout their university life: academic and non-academic services (Shuh et al., 2010). The academic one includes academic writing skills and subject-specific support to bridge the gap between knowledge and understanding (Dhillon, 2006). Non-academic student services concern about financial issues, security, mobility and campus access, transition support, and housing (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2018).

Wilson (2006) claims that there is a strong relationship between student's academic development and student services. Shaheen et al. (2020) support the same statement by indicating positive relationship between students' educational outcomes and their active use of the support system. However, there has been insufficient research on how student services and academic development is related, particularly with regard to freshmen. The literature concludes that student services help to improve students' academic achievement, but it is not known how these support services function to fulfill students' demands (Cutrona et al., 1994; DeBerard et al., 2004; McKay et al., 2003; Mortenson, 2006; Rodriguez, 2002; Tinto, 1997a, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

The background information on student services of public universities in Azerbaijan identifies that they do not provide such services in a unified division (UNESCO, 2009). Based on Capstone team members' experience as former undergraduate students, the

public universities do not own well-established student services to support students, particularly freshmen, to reach their desired academic goals.

According to the preliminary data of interviewed three freshmen from three public universities in Azerbaijan, student services are either non-existent or exist but do not meet the needs of students.

Given significant issues such as writing skills and subject-specific support to bridge the gap between knowledge and understanding and to address uncertainty related to student services in public HEIs in Azerbaijan, it was important to study this issue. In that sense, our research problem was to explore emerging student services and the type of assistance they provide to aid freshmen to succeed academically as well as their perceptions of student services at their respective universities in Azerbaijan.

The purpose of the study

Our Capstone project team aimed to explore student services in three public universities in Azerbaijan. The study also targeted to investigate freshmen's perceptions of student services. The secondary aim was to identify the roles and responsibilities of student services administration and representatives.

Research questions

1. What kind of support do student services provide in public universities to foster freshmen's academic development?

2. What are the freshmen's perceptions about student services in their respective university?

Significance of Study

In this study, our goal was to understand the role of student services in the academic development of freshmen studying in public universities in Azerbaijan. In particu-

lar, the development of student services and the types of support they provide has never been a topic of discussion in Azerbaijan. This study paved the way for the concept of student services in the academic development of freshmen in Azerbaijan's higher education institutions (HEIs). This study could make a series of contributions at the institutional, governmental, and societal levels by investigating freshmen's perceptions of student services and the types of support they receive in HEIs.

The suggested strategic guideline may contribute to the improvement of student services at all three public HEIs. Three universities could also review their internal policy paper to make necessary changes related to emerging student services so that they could be established as a unified structure within the education entity. The findings of this capstone project may be used to strengthen connections between student services and freshmen's academic development in public universities of Azerbaijan.

From this standpoint, this study may contribute to the development of student services in HEIs in Azerbaijan which in turn may increase the number of satisfied university students. As a result, if higher education institutions in Azerbaijan aim to enhance their students' academic performance, they should try to undertake continuous improvement for student services. Thus, the study may have redounded the benefit of universities considering the improvement of students' academic performance, reduce the dropout rate at universities and increase the graduation rate.

At the legislative level, the strategic guideline could also suggest the Ministry of Education to set a proper concept of policy aligned with the law on higher education (HE) of the Republic of Azerbaijan to develop a structure for student services in public universities.

Since aims of higher education are to make civic learning and democratic engagement to promote students' social and cognitive abilities, empathy, and dedication to civic life, the

establishment of a unified student services structure HEIs remains vital (NASPA, 2013). Given the contribution to the society, this research may benefit freshmen to grow to their full potential before graduation and become a dedicated engaged citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Definitions of terms

Academic development is a student's successful acquisition of knowledge and skills acquired during their educational experience, as well as their capacity to apply those skills and knowledge (Stefani, 2010). This term also refers to a student's superior academic performance during their university studies in our context.

The term *freshman*, as it is defined in the Cambridge dictionary, means "first-year student" in a collage.

The term *student services* means comprehensive guidance to students or a set of guidelines for assisting students in all areas of their education: interpersonal, social, environmental, and academic (Schuh, 2016; Torres et al., 2016).

The term of *public universities* encompasses a state higher education institution in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is an educational institution with the status of a legal entity implementing higher education programs (Basis of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on higher educational institution, 1995; 2009).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter employs four sections. In the Introduction section, we define student services and the gap in the existing literature related to the research topic. The second section is discussing the significance of student services. The third section deals with freshmen's transition to college. The final section summarizes major issues related to student services.

Definition of Student Services

Student services function to improve student's academic success, including freshmen. The term "student service" has been defined by many authors as the main factor that affects students' academic performance and assists students in academic advising and tutoring to increase their academic success (Blum, 2014; Ciabanu, 2013). National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA, 2010) defines student services concept as divisions or departments which provide services and academic support in higher education. Its purpose is to ensure the students' growth and development during the academic experience (Blum, 2014).

Given the definition, student services are part of the support provided to students in higher education institutions (HEIs). Charlito (2017) has emphasized the development of students through students' services within different dimensions - social, moral, civic, intellectual, and spiritual. In this regard, students' learning goals and commitment, the quality of teacher support, and student support services at universities have a significant impact on their academic progress (Ulate & Carballo, 2011). Considering the diversity of freshmen, student support services should also contribute to their learning and communication skills, subject knowledge, and cognitive advancement and guide them through their academic life (Raskamp & Engberg, 2014).

If we inquire about the background of the student affairs or services in the context of Azerbaijan State Universities, either they do not exist or there have been some attempts to establish this structure in two private universities, but insights related to public universities are missing (UNESCO, 2009). While researchers have found that support from college leads to improve students' academic performance, still the existing literature has not explored how the functioning of these support services meets freshmen's needs (Cutrona et al., 1994; De-Berard et al., 2004; McKay et al., 2003; Mortenson, 2006; Rodriguez, 2002; Tinto, 1997a, 2005).

Significance of the Student Services

The literature concludes that most university students are young people with little life experience. Therefore, it is necessary to support newly admitted students to adapt to the university environment and academic load (Carter et al., 2006; James et al., 2010; Wintre and Yaffe, 2000; Zepke, 2006).

The transition from adolescence to early adulthood for young people who are in the first year of university is an adaptation process that requires support from universities (Govindarajo & Kumar, 2012; Latifah & Mansor, 2007; Rausch & Hamilton, 2006; O'Neill, Wallstedt, Eika, & 2011). Most students who are challenged due to transition to university need someone who could guide and direct them through their studies, and the most usual method found at universities is a personal tutor system (Owen, 2002).

Hence, James et al. (2010) have emphasized that most freshmen struggle with handling stressful circumstances in a constructive manner during their transition to university life and, that certain people face a range of challenges throughout this process. Without effective student services, students that do not have an academic, emotional, and social connection

with the institution are more likely to give up their studies, and they are often expelled from university or achieve below-average academic performance (Zepke, 2006).

Westrick et al. (2015) have shown that first-year school results are important predictors for retention in study programs. The better these results are, the more students do not drop out. Likewise, Ciabanu (2013) has concluded that freshmen who are more likely to drop out consider the school uninterested and unmotivated because of the lack of student services as they contribute to the quality of their learning experience and academic success. Student services assist in reducing dropout rates and improving the student experience (Ciabanu, 2013).

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), connecting with the university's academic and social environment, as well as the quality of such interaction, are critical components of the university adaptation process for freshmen. For freshmen to successfully adjust to university life, it is necessary to address and discuss related issues in detail (Gizir et al., 2010).

As mentioned above, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, NASPA, 2012) identifies the concept of student services as divisions of departments in higher education where students are provided with services to ensure their growth and development during their academic years. A great deal of evidence suggests that students' academic achievement and active usage of the support system are positively connected (Shaheen et al., 2020).

Hammond et al. (2007) have emphasized another main factor that is the lack of student services influencing the dropout rate and have found that the graduation rate of students using student services was higher, while the students who did not use student services had a higher risk of dropping out. If we take students as customers, customer should always be sat-

isfied. Satisfied students are likely to remain loyal to their educational institution as a result of the quality of the services (Mohzan, at al, 2011, Chandrashekaran, et al, 2007). With the same analogy, students will drop out from their higher education institution if they are dissatisfied with the educational services provided (Alridge & Rowley, 2001).

Dhillon, McGowan, and Wang (2006) have stated that there was a discrepancy between the set of services for students that were formally announced and the access to the same services. UNESCO (2009) has reported that the functionality of the student services differs from one another, there are several common components and responsibilities that need to be assured by the higher education institutions to meet students' interests and emerging needs. In that respect, attention should be drawn to some specific commitments of the students' services (UNESCO, 2009).

Freshmen's transition to college

That said, Pittman and Richmond (2008) have asserted that understanding university belonging, friendship quality, and psychological adjustment during the transition to college are crucial for academic preparation for freshmen. Tinto (2005) has also concluded that making more academic and social connections may lead students to succeed both academically and socially in college. He has emphasized that freshmen need to be more guided via support services to achieve their desired results. Gizir et al. (2014) have rmentioned that colleges should ensure that their student support services actively address the issues mentioned above, so that students are able to manage such a challenging period of their lives that is transitioning to college, adjust to the environment, and further succeed (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004; Earwaker, 1992; Holmbeck & Wandrei, 1993; Lafreniere & Ledgerwood, 1997).

Likewise, most freshmen in Azerbaijan are young people with limited experience, Mammadzada et al. (2008) have recommended the establishment of a support system for stu-

dents through various assistance or support programs at educational institutions in the country.

Conclusion

This literature review has examined the significance of student support services in the academic lives of students, particularly freshmen's academic achievements. This chapter has also introduced subtopics such as the definition of student services and the gaps defined in the existing literature related to this concept. Besides, the subtopic of freshmen transitioning to college has been comprehensively discussed.

Limited literature and research related to the Azerbaijani context have necessitated exploring student services in public universities in the country to generate some knowledge about how they respond to freshmen's needs and contribute to their academic achievement.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

Our Capstone project team aimed to explore student services in three public universities in Azerbaijan. The study also targeted to investigate freshmen's perceptions of student services. The secondary aim was to identify the roles and responsibilities of student services administration and representatives.

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What kind of support do student services provide in public universities to foster freshmen's academic development?

2. What are the freshmen's perceptions about student services in their respective universities?

This chapter includes the research methodology and design, sampling design and techniques, target population, data collection, and analysis procedures that we intended to use in our study.

This section provides a description of the methodology that we used in this study. Mishra and Alok (2017) have claimed that research methodology is the science of carrying out research systematically. In this study, we used a qualitative research methodology that was the most relevant because it allowed us to interview involved parties, obtain freshmen's perceptions about the studied topic, and analyze qualitative data that were central to our research focus (Merriam & Tisdel, 2016).

Research Design

Creswell and Clark (2007) defines the research design as "procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies" (p. 58). To put it differently, the research design specifies the technique for gathering and analyzing the necessary data, as well as the methodologies to be used to collect and evaluate the data, and how all of these were used to answer the research questions. When there is insufficient knowledge on a phenomenon or an issue that has not been precisely identified, exploratory research is undertaken (Saunders et al., 2007). Considering our project team aim in this study was to identify the phenomenon of student services at public universities, as well as the freshmen's perceptions of these services, exploratory research fit our study design. Hence, its goal is not to produce ultimate and conclusive answers to the research questions, but rather to examine the study issue in varied depths.

Target Population

The target population of this Capstone project was the freshmen, student services representatives and tutors in three public universities in Azerbaijan. In this qualitative study, in-

dividual and focus group interviews were used to answer the research questions (Blum, et al 2001).

Sampling Method and Sample Size

We used non-probability sampling, which best fit our qualitative research. Given the type of sampling, student services representatives and tutors were selected by our Capstone team members purposefully as Creswell (2014) stated which could help to collect reliable data for the study. Participants for two focus groups were selected by applying purposive convenience sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This sampling method assisted our team members in selecting nine freshmen who provided rich information. All in all, we selected three freshmen, one student services representative, and one tutor from each university as a target population to answer the research questions (Myers & Newman, 2007). Thus, we created two focus groups: Focus Group one consisted of four freshmen while Focus Group two comprised of five freshmen (Casey & Kueger, 2000).

Setting

According to the official website of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, there are currently 40 public universities in Azerbaijan, with 32 of them located in Baku (MoE, 2022). We selected three public universities that were our primary research sites:University A, University B, University C .We have chosen these three public universities because they had a large student population of freshman.

Recruitment

Our Capstone team recruited three freshmen as well as a representative and a tutor from each of three public universities selected for this study.

As Creswell (2014) claims, we received an official permit from the Ministry of Education (MoE), which granted permission from the university administration to conduct inter-

views with freshmen, student services representatives, and tutors at those universities. Then

we invited the representatives of student services and tutors to be interviewed for an hour.

The recruitment process ended up with focus group interviews with nine freshmen.

Sources of Data

Semi structured Interview. In this qualitative study, the data obtained through interviews since

Patton (2015) has defined an interview as what was "in and on someone else's mind" (p.

426). The rationale behind selecting an interview as a data collecting method was that it di-

rectly aligned with the selected research design. Furthermore, as a type of interview, a semi

structured one was applied. Considering the design of semi structured interviews, we drafted

interview questions in a more and less structured way (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). The open

and close-ended interview questions allowed us to gather enough information from all re-

spondents. To specify, our purpose was to interview university representatives and tutors who

engaged in supporting students' academic development, and freshmen to gain a better under-

standing of our research topic.

   Focus Group. The second source of data was focus group interviews in which "data

collection occurred in and was facilitated by, a group setting" (Shamdasani, 2015, p.

17). Since the purposeful sampling used, those participants who were the most knowledge-

able about the subject were involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that, our target popu-

lation - freshmen, provided us with necessary detailed information whereby we had a chance

to analyze the data to find answers to our research questions.

Data Collection

   DeMarrais (2004) defines a research interview as "a process in which a researcher and

participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 55).

Data collection process started with negotiations and getting permission from the manage-

ment of all three universities. We contacted our possible participants and shared our research topic with them. Then we obtained a list of freshmen studying at the universities, their group numbers, phone and email contacts from the relevant office to make it easier to reach them. In addition, we asked the faculty to notify freshmen about the focus group interviews we conducted. In the next step, we defined the exact time and place for interviews. We asked for a permission of university staff by the help of informed consent for conducting interviews (Creswell, 2014).

We started the interviews on February 24, 2022. Subsequently, we interviewed one university representative and one tutor from each university. Thus, we interviewed person to person six individuals, two representatives from three selected universities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

We also conducted two focus group interviews with three freshmen from each university. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain relevant information that we needed for answering our second research question. In the focus group interviews, we addressed twelve questions to the freshmen. The duration of focus group interviews was an hour (Casey & Kueger, 2000; Myers & Newman, 2007). Regarding individual interviews with the university staff, we addressed around 20 questions to the respondents. The length of interviews was an hour. Our Capstone team completed data collection process on March 17, 2022.

Data Analysis

To come up with findings, student services representatives, tutors and current freshmen were parts of the interviews for collecting relevant data. We started to analyze qualitative data simultaneously during the data collection process which was the much-preferred way to analyze qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) the final product, strategic guideline, was designed/compiled based on the data al-

ready collected and gradually analyzed, which accompanied the entire process. Hence, it was important to code the collected data according to whatever scheme was relevant to our research study. Based on our interview findings, we answered both research questions posed. Since the scope of our Capstone project was small, Saldana (2009) mentioned Vivo Codes could be used as the sole method of choice for small-scale studies. After coding, we categorized all them into major groups. Then we revealed the important topics from the categories. We systematized the findings and concluded them to present properly.

Trustworthiness

The degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and procedures used to validate the quality of a study is referred to as a study's trustworthiness (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have defined four criteria to assess the internal validity of the findings. These criterias comprise the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Credibility. Part of guaranteeing a study's trustworthiness - its credibility - is that the researcher is trustworthy in carrying out the study in as ethical a manner as feasible (Merriam & Tisdel, 2016). In our study, we employed triangulation and member checking strategies (Creswell, 2014).

Triangulation. Patton (2015) defines the term triangulation, in whatever format it takes, promotes credibility and quality by addressing the issue that a study's conclusions are only the result of a single technique, a sole source, or a single investigator. The rationale behind using triangulation was to guarantee that the level of accuracy is adequate in our study, since the information was drawn from numerous sources (Creswell, 2014).

Member check. The main idea behind member checking is that the researcher requests input on the early findings from numerous respondents (Merriam & Tisdel, 2016). We utilized this

strategy to prevent misunderstanding and make sure that participants have access to the find-ings.

Study Limitations

The first limitation of our study is that we selected only three universities. Therefore, the data conducted only from three public universities in Azerbaijan. Another limitation of this study was the freshmen's lack of experience. Because they have not yet completed their first year of study, they may find it difficult to respond to these questions. Although partici-pants selected purposefully, another potential limitation was a lack of information freshmen may share during the focus group interview.

Ethical Issues

In order to protect the privacy of research participants, several steps were included to informed consent - confidentiality, and anonymity which are considered as a main ethical consideration. An informed consent sent to the selected public universities included the goal of study and time frame, permission for the interview, their anonymity were maintained. Ac-cording to Myers and Newman (2007) informed consent ensures people and make them to feel free to take part in the interview without fear of recognition. In addition, before dissemi-nating questionnaire, we got university permission and the universities were provided consent letter from the director of Master of Arts in Education Management (MAEM) program.

Chapter 4: Research Findings/Results

Our Capstone project team aimed to explore student services in three public universities in Azerbaijan. The study also targeted to investigate freshmen's perceptions of student services. The secondary aim was to identify the roles and responsibilities of student services administration and representatives.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What kind of support do student services provide in public universities to foster freshmen's academic development?

2. What are the freshmen's perceptions about student services in their respective university?

Before starting the study, our capstone project team members assumed that there were student services departments and/or units in public universities in Azerbaijan. We intended to find an established structure for serving freshmen, so we designed the study to meet our expectations. However, we found that student services were not functioning as a unified department to support freshmen, rather they were still emerging as a structure within the educational entities. Collected data and data analysis revealed that deputy deans, student services representatives, and tutors took the responsibility of helping students with their academic needs in each respected university accordingly.

This chapter contains three sections that represent research findings. The sections are Tutoring and the Responsibilities of a Tutor; Deputy Deans'/Student Services Representative's Responsibilities; Student's Perceptions. In each section, we will address the findings divided as subsections.

Tutoring and the Responsibilities of a Tutor

In all three public universities, the student service department as a unified structure did not exist, however, the responsibility of the student service department was fulfilled by

tutors and the dean's office. Tutors were supposed to provide academic assistance and feed-

back to tutees so that they were able to comprehend the course materials. Also, tutors were

responsible to identify students' academic needs and help them in problem-solving, neverthe-

less, they were not required to be in direct contact with all the students apart from nominated

class representatives. Considering the indirect contact with students, the class representatives

acted as a link between students and tutors.

The tutors were responsible for motivating and encouraging students to improve their

academic performance (for example, by being supportive and organizing extra classes during

the exam term), but the study found that tutors were not involved in participating in training

sessions accordingly.

The Capstone team discovered contradicting insights related to tutoring and responsi-

bilities of a tutor while analyzing both tutors' and students' perceptions on them. The tutors

believed that they were not only listening to students' concerns on academic challenges they

encountered but also assisting them to overcome those difficulties by teaching extra hours,

and guiding them throughout their academic life. According to tutors and deputy deans, tutors

were monitoring needs, even if some tutors were not directly engaging with them. Given that

Vusal emphasized:

> Sadəcə olaraq sırf bizim sinif nümayəndəsi əlaqə saxlayır.Bizlə əlaqədə deyil.Yəni
> biz nəsə olanda yəgin ki, ona deyirik, sinif nümayəndəsi oda, tyutora deyir,ondan
> öyrənir. O bizlə əlaqəyə girir.Amma biz onunla əlaqəyə keçmək üçün,gərək başqa bir
> insanla əlaqəyə keçək.Bu elə bil ki biraz uzun bir əlaqədir.

> [Tutor just keeps in touch with our class representative. She doesn't keep in touch
> with us directly.Thus when we need her assistance , the class representative tells the
> tutor. To get in touch with a tutor, we need to get in touch with another person. Ittakes
> a little longer.]

Likewise, all three freshmen from University A reported that their tutor helped their

class to comprehend the course content before the exam. One of them stated:

Riyazi analizdə çətinlik var idi,ümumi qrupda var idi bu, başa düşmürdü və çətinlik

çəkirdi uşaqlar.Biz bunu ama dekanlığa bildirdik. Uşaqlar startsa və dekanlığa

bildirdlər ki, biz müəllimi başa düşməkdə çətinlik çəkirik.Ondan sonra dekanlıqda

əlavə olaraq buna həll olaraq dərslər saldırlar. Əslində nəticədə pis olmadı

sonra.İmtahan nəticələridə sırf həmin fənndən yaxşı olmuşdu.

[There was a problem in the mathematical analysis, since we were struggling to un

derstand the instructor's teaching method.We reported it to the dean's office that we

find hard to understand the instructor's method. Then, the dean's office arranged extra

classes to solve this issue. In fact, the result of the exam turned out to be good

enough. We all were satisfied with the outcome of the mid-term exam.]

Although the above-mentioned quote illustrated some of the tutor responsibilities,

freshmen from University A and B did not support that claim.

Likewise, Ms. Aysel, a tutor at University C mentioned the additional responsibilities

she had. Her job also entailed inspiring students' academic growth. She emphasized the im-

portance of approaching students individually and doing it constantly:

Bəzi kurslardan uğursuz olan tələbələrin fərdi kurikulumlarını təşkil etmək, onların

akademik göstəricilərinin yüksəldilməsinə dəstək olmaq, onlara düzgün istiqamət

vermək xüsusilə vacibdir.

[It is especially important for us to organize students' individual curricula who is

failed from some courses, support also them to improve their academic performance,

and give them the right direction.]

Besides, the tutor and the deputy dean at university C highlighted being punctual and

accessible, providing constructive feedback, adequately communicating with the freshman,

and establishing friendly relationships with them as the core responsibilities of tutors. The

representative of University B also indicated that fostering a supportive environment, developing positive relationships, and rigorous communication with students. Ms. Aytakin, a tutor at University B stated:

> Düşünürəm ki, tələbələrin universitetdə həmişə özlərini dəstəkləndiklərini hiss etmələri çox vacibdir. Ümumiyyətlə, tələbələrlə, xüsusən də yeni qəbul olunmuş tələbələrlə necə yaxşı anlaşdığımızı vurğulamaq istərdim. Yəni biz xüsusən tələbələrlə işləyirik, yəni hər bir tələbəyə fərdi yanaşırıq və rəftar edirik. Başqa sözlə, biz tələbələrimizi öz övladlarımız hesab edirik, onlarla hər gün işləyirik və onlara məlumat verdiyimiz hər hansı bir problemi həll etmək üçün 7/24 əlaqə saxlamağa hazırıq.

> [I believe it is critical that students always feel supported at the university. I'd like to emphasize, in general, how well we get along with students, particularly newly admitted students. That is, we work exclusively with students, which means we approach and treat each student individually. In other words, we consider our students to be our children, work with them each day, and are available for contact 24/7 to resolve any issues we have informed them about.]

In conclusion to tutors' responsibilities, tutors were not only in charge of supporting students' academic requirements, but also motivating them to achieve their desired goal.

Deputy Deans'/ Student Services Representative's Responsibilities

According to the study findings, Deputy Deans at University A and B were acting as a part of student support to facilitate student learning. They were inquiring about freshmen's concerns and attended to questions posed by them. One of their responsibilities was to promote student learning by organizing additional seminars delivered by the department's chair or faculty member and providing constructive feedback when necessary. Besides, maintain-

ing friendly relationships and collaboration with students to create transparency and increase the productivity of tutoring sessions was among deputy deans'/student services representative's responsibilities.

Another responsibility of deputy deans'/student services representative's was to communicate with the faculty members/instructors to ensure that the student learning process was genuine. Nonetheless, two of three deputy deans fulfilled this responsibility. The deputy dean at University A claimed:

Mənə elə gəlir ki, ünsiyyət birinci amildir. Gərək tələbələr özünə yaxın hiss elədiyi insanla işləməyi daha çox sevirlər. Məsələn bizdə digər dekan müavinimiz var Sabir müəllim var. Məsələn özümdən deməyim. Sabir müəllim daha çox tələbələrin deyək ki, pulunun yığılması ilə məşğul olur. Əslində tələbələr onu sevməməlidir amma Sabir müəllimi çox sevirlər. Misal üçün çünki işində ünsiyyətin böyük rolu olduğunu düşünürəm.

[Communication appears to be the most important factor, in my opinion. Students should prefer to work with someone they know and trust. Sabir muallim, for example, is another deputy dean. Even myself. Sabir muallim is more involved in collecting tuition fees from students. In fact, students are not supposed to like him, but they adore Sabir muəllim. Because I believe communication is important to him in his work.]

Considering deputy deans' responsibilities, they were expected to solve students' problems and provide them with the necessary assistance.

Two deputy deans out of three, highlighted the responsibility of developing strong relationships with local and oversea universities to benefit from their student support struc-

tures and implement international experience in their respective university. The deputy dean, Hijran at University A shared the following insight:

Digər əməkdaşlarımız ki, digər xarici universitetlərə, əsasən Türkiyə universitetlərinə getməklə orda "öğrenci işləri", belə deyim "tələbə işləri" mərkəzi gedir, həmin mərkəzdə fəaliyyət göstərməklə iki həftə, bir həftə ərzində fəaliyyətlərini öyrənirlər. Və daha sonra gəlib burda da onun tətbiq olunması üçün belə deyim, təkliflərlə çıxış olunur filan.

[Some employees of the administration visit Turkish universities, where there is a student service department , get to know about their responsibilities and missions, where they study and participate in workshops for two weeks or a week. And then they come back here and work on projects to implement the learned experience in our university and so on.]

At University A deputy dean tended to deal with problems and guide students, particularly through collaboration with their local and international counterparts.

According to university representatives, the primary function of student services was to help students solve their problems related to their studies. University representatives stated that students posed many questions and sought ways out to overcome challenges they encountered at the beginning of the semester, especially freshmen. However, they did keep in close contact with students and reported any problems to the dean's office or faculty at their respective universities. Ms. Kamala, a tutor at University B professed:

Bizim əsas vəzifəmiz tələbələrlə müəllimlər arasında əlaqə yaratmaq üçün tələbələrə xidmət göstərmək, onlarla müəllimlə görüşməkdir. Bunun nəticəsidir ki, tələbələrlə tez-tez əlaqə saxlayırıq. Demək olar ki, bütün problemləri ilə bizə müraciət edirlər.

[Our primary responsibility is to serve students and meet with dozens of teachers in

in order to establish contact between students and teachers. As a result, we have

frequent contact with students. They come to us with almost all of their problems.]

Another representative was responsible to address students' problems, provide acad-

emic support to students, which was also a form of support for faculty. Given the additional

responsibilities, Mr. Parviz, a tutor at University A highlighted.

Bizim öhdəliklərimiz, ilk növbədə, dediyim kimi, akademik işi ictimai işlərdən

ayırmaq, akademik işlə məşğul olanların fəaliyyətinin daha sərbəst və rahat olmasını

təmin etməkdir.

[Our responsibilities, first and foremost, as I said, are to separate academic work

from public affairs, and to ensure that the activities of those engaged in academic

work is more free and comfortable.]

Nearly all university representatives ascertained that students would be more enthusi-

astic about academic life if they studied in a supportive environment.

Subsequently, universities' representatives shared insights on how to be an effective tutor

and deputy dean. They emphasized that tutors should know the curriculum and have content

knowledge as well as maintain regular contact with students to ensure their academic devel-

opment. Mr. Parviz a tutor at University A noted:

Tələbə xidmətləri, tutorlar universitetin tədris metodologiyasını və planını, eləcə də

universitet tələbələrinin akademik gözləntilərini başa düşməlidirlər. Onlar dekanlıqla

müntəzəm əlaqə saxlamalı, həm universitetin, həm də tələbənin gözləntilərindən

xəbərdar olmalıdırlar. Bundan əlavə, onlar öz hərəkətlərinə görə məsuliyyət

daşımalıdırlar.

[The significance of familiarity with the university curriculum to substantiate the

prior claim. They must understand the university's teaching methodology and plan,

as well as the academic expectations of the university's students. They should main

tain regular contact with the dean's office and be aware of the expectations of both the

university and the student. Additionally, they must accept accountability for their ac

tions.]

Roughly, all representatives from three universities asserted that for performing well,

one should continually strive to improve themselves, seek feedback and act on feedback from

both professionals and students in the field of education. Mr.Turan, the associate responsible

for student affairs under the vise rector at University C spoke to the point:

İnanıram ki, tələbə xidmətləri öz sahələrində daim təkmilləşə bilərlər. Dünya hər gün

dəyişir və inkişaf edir. Bütün bu texnoloji irəliləyişləri nəzərə alaraq, biz də onları

işimizə daxil etməliyik.

[I believe that they can always improve in their field. The world changes and evolves

on a daily basis. In light of all of these technological advancements, we must

incorporate them into our work as well.]

Given the study findings, representatives from three universities perceived themselves

not only as tutors or administrators but also as a link between professors, university adminis-

tration, and students. All six representatives from three universities interviewed assumed that

student services at university benefited students positively. Finally, the answers to our ques-

tion "What do you want to change or offer in student services related to academic develop-

ment at your university?" were based on technical suggestions rather than strategic considera-

tions. For instance, Ms. Kamala, a tutor at University B believed,

Tələbələrin sayı ilə müqayisədə işçilərin sayı azdır, hər repetitora 300-400 tələbə

olur.

[The number of employees is small in comparison to the number of students, with

each tutor having between 300 and 400 students.]

Ms.Aytakin, a tutor at University B added:

Biz çox istərdik ki, smart lövhələr və proyektorlu əlavə iş otaqları yalnız arzu

etdiyimiz kimi olsun. Mən texnoloji irəliləyişləri tövsiyə edərdim.

[We would love to have the smart boards and additional study rooms with projectors

only that we desire. I'd recommend technological advancements.]

Hence, universities who assume the positive role of student services in the academic

development of their students believe that with continued development of university re-

sources, these activities will achieve greater success. (add and summarize responsibilities)

In contrast to freshmen perceptions mentioned above, the deputy deans and tutors at

three universities ascertained that the students had been provided with orientation sessions

from the first day.

On the contrary, tutors say they are available 24/7 and students can contact them at

any time. One of the tutors, from University B, Aydan says:

Biz onlar üçün hər şeyi edən insanlarıq, hər şey bizim borcumuzdur.

[We are the people who do everything for them, everything is our duty.]

Student's Perceptions

Nine freshmen in two focus groups (Group One, four students and Group Two, five

students) were interviewed to receive their perceptions about student services. Aysun, a

freshman from university B, pointed out:

Universitetə girəndən sonra müəllimlərimin səbəbi ilə depressiyaya girdim və özümü

zorla çıxartdım vəziyyətdən. Amma mənə bunda universitetin heç bir dəstəyi olmadı.

[After entering the university, I became depressed because of my teachers and forced

myself out of the situation. But the university did not support me about this.]

The quote above spotlighted the freshman's problem related to the faculty that may not have been promptly and properly attended. Sevda, a freshman, from university C shared the following insight:

Qrup yoldaşlarım aşağı bal yığmışdılar deyə onlarla özümü fərqli görürdüm. Ona görə ünsiyyət qura bilmədim və adaptasiya problemlərim oldu.

[I saw myself differently with my group mates, because they had low scores in the entrance exam. That's why I could not communicate and had adaptation problems.]

Noticeably, Sevda encountered challenges in communicating with peers and adapting to the academic environment.

Likewise, Lala, a freshman from University A faced some challenges before the exams. Lala narrated her short story about how she and her coursemates attempted to get out the difficulties related to the exams. She commented:

Universitetdəki ilk imtahanımda dərs materiallarının çoxluğu, imtahana hazırlaşmaq stresi və digər faktorlara görə, buna öyrəşmək mənə çox çətin oldu. Qrup yoldaşlarım-la birlikdə köməkləşdik, çətin dərslərə bir yerdə kitabxanada hazırlaşdıq, universitet bizim üçün heç bir dəstək təmin etmədi.

[Due to the large number of teaching materials, stress of preparing for the exam and other factors in my first university exam, it was very difficult for me to get used to it. My groupmates and I helped each other, we prepared for difficult lessons together in the library, the university did not provide any support for us.]

The aforementioned quote unveiled that difficulties freshmen had may have not been attended by the representatives from the student services.

In general, our Capstone team's research findings disclosed that students were unaware of the existence of student services, what services they were required to deliver and how they were supposed to function. Hence, both focus groups confirmed that they knew who the tutors and deputy deans were. Lala, a freshman, from University A professed:

Biz universitetə təzə başlayanda sinifə iki xanım daxil oldu və sədr olduqlarını

vurğuladı. Onlar dedilər ki, əgər imtahan vaxtı sizin haqq və hüquqlarınız pozulsa, ya

dərs vaxtı müəllimləriniz sizin şəxsiyyətinizi alçaltsa bizə müraciət edərsiniz. Amma

onları gördüyüm tək vaxt odur. Ondan sonra onları heç vaxt görməmişəm.

[When we had just started university, two women entered the classroom and em

phasized that they were chairmen. They said that if your rights were violated during

the exam, or if your instructors insulted you during the lesson, you would contact us.

But that's the only time I saw them. I have never seen them since.]

The students assumed that they may have been the representatives of the student services. When problems caused by instructors occurred, freshmen complained to the tutor and the deputy dean but received a number of threats not to proceed further with their problems. Aysun, a freshman, from university B reported:

Mən bu problemi dekanlığa bildirəndə mənə dedilər ki, şikayət yazsanız ərizənizə

baxılmayacaq, müəllimənizlə aranız pozulacaq və qiymətlərinizdə problem olacaq.

[When I reported this problem to the dean's office, I was told that if you wrote a

complaint letter, it would not be considered, your relationship with your instructor

would be broken, and there would be a problem with your grades.]

Aysun's insights manifested that not every student had direct access to their tutors and deputy deans. They could possibly contact their tutors and deputy dean if their group had a

nominated representative who had direct contact and the right to talk to them. Regarding to

Aysun's quote, Elshad, a freshman, from university B added:

>Düzünü desəm, tutorun nömrəsi məndə var, amma sinif nümayəndəsindən başqa
>
>yalnız məndə var. Sinif nümayəndəsindən zorla almışam. Tutorun nömrəsini heç kimə
>
>vermirlər. Tutorlar deyirlər ki, hər tələbə ilə əlaqə saxlamağa ehtiyac yoxdur. Qrup
>
>nümayəndəsindən başqa heç kim tutorla əlaqə saxlamır.
>
>[To be honest, I have the tutor's number, but I only have it, except our class
>
>representative. I got it by force from the class representative. They don't give the
>
>tutor's number to anyone. The tutors say that there is no need to contact every student.
>
>No one contacts the tutor except a group representative.]

Both freshmen may have perceived deputy dean and tutors unreachable and lacked

the opportunities to have direct contact with them as well as to receive guidance and support

in case challenges occurred.

The focus groups claimed that only a phone call and whatsapp platform were used as

a means of communication between tutors and the class representatives during the

COVID-19 pandemic, which either stopped or occasionally utilized after returning to normal.

In all three universities there was not a unified online communication platform for students,

including freshmen to have direct contact with deputy dean and tutors when needed.

In addition, the interviewed freshmen complained that tutors ignored their problems

and did not attempt to solve them. They were not aware who to approach when they were

academically challenged and when they encountered a problem. In relation to the ignorance

displayed by the tutors, Elshad, a freshman, from university B defined a tutor as "there is a

name, but there is no physical self."

Considering students' academic development, the most common issue the students stressed was the language of instruction in some departments at University C, which was delivered in the English language. Thus, not all students' English language levels in the class could be equally the same, and it may have impeded the academic development of students. Gunay, a freshman, from University C noted:

Məncə, ən böyük problem uşaqların dil səviyyəsinə görə qruplaşdırılmamasıdır. Əgər Ingilis dilini öyrənirəmsə və ingilis dili səviyyəm B2, C1-dirsə, A1/A2 səviyyəli tələbə ilə eyni qrupda oxumağım inkişafıma mənfi təsir göstərir.

[I think the biggest problem is that students are not grouped according to language level. If I study English and my English level is B2, C1, and studying in the same group with a student with A1 / A2 level has a negative impact on my development.]

Language level was not the only issue stressed by the freshmen but also the content of subjects, lack of coursebooks, and the language of instruction were among the most emphasized problems. In relation to the problems, Leyla, a freshman from University A professed:

Bizim kompüterlərlə təchiz olunmuş yeni müasir kitabxanamız var. Təhsil naziri gəlib açıb. Bir gün ora getdim və mənə dedilər ki, bu kitabxana ancaq magistratura tələbələri üçündür.

[We have a new modern library with computers. The Minister of Education came and opened it. I went there one day and I was told that this library is only for master's students.]

The quote above clearly displayed freshman's concerns about not being able to benefit from the newly opened library and the resources may have been available in it, meaning the library may have not been functioning properly to provide the necessary services to them.

That being said, students also highlighted their concern regarding not being informed about innovations taking place at the university. Hence, Vusal, a freshman from University C stated:

Bizim universitetdə ikili diplom layihəsi ilə bağlı bizə heç nə deməyiblər. Kimlər iştirak edə bilər, kimlər iştirak edə bilməz və s.. İkili diplom proqramı ilə bağlı Facebook-da canlı yayıma baxdım və orada suallarımı verdim. Suallarıma cavab verdilər, amma yenə də bəzi aydın olmayan məqamlar qaldım. Universitetdə heç kimdən cavab ala bilmədim.

[We were not told anything about the dual degree project at our university. Who can participate, who can't, etc. I watched a live broadcast on Facebook about the dual de gree program and asked my questions there. They answered my questions, but still I was left with some unclear points. I could not get an answer from anyone at the uni versity.]

Vusal's quote uncovered perceptions that were shared by other freshmen from all three universities about student services in general as well as unveiled their unsystematic organization, lack of adequate academic support, and overwork of tutors and deans, which may have impacted student's interest, their motivation, and academic performance. Therefore, freshmen may not have felt a sort of belonging to the university they were studying at, growing to their full potential, and succeeding in their studies.

Chapter 5: Final Product - Strategic Plan Proposal for Student Services Division

Strategic Plan Proposal for Student Services Division

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Gunay Gojali

Capstone Project
MAEM 2022

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Mission Statement ⎯⎯⎯

The purpose of proposing the **Student Services Structure** is to create a division that ensures students' academic development and excellence by providing high quality student services **at public universities in Azerbaijan.**

4

Why needed?

Wilson (2006) claims that there is a strong relationship between students' academic development and student services. The findings of our research indicate mismatching between the concept of student services as well as their structures within organizational charts investigated in the literature and emerging student services that are functioning in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Azerbaijan.

The study findings report a need for establishment of a distinct division within selected HEIs organizational chart (Yunusova, 2020). In addition, the finding from document analysis necessitate the review of disorganized student services structures operating in investigated HEIs.

5

The Priorities _____

The following priorities that we suggest in this plan are related to the initiatives described in the strategic plan documents of several HEIs (University Akron, 2010; Long Beach City College, 2016; Santa Rosa Junior College, 2019).

Priority 1:	Priority 2:
To create academic support mechanism (academic tutoring) and student support programs (learning communities) to maintain the efficiency of student services (Thomas et al., 2002). • To structure new student orientation to build up student success; • To create student services web page for easier access and for promptly and properly transmitting and receiving information; • To provide opportunities to join student government and student clubs; • To arrange extracurricular and volunteer activities.	Certain strategies should be developed to ease freshmen's transitions to university life (Clinciu, 2013). • Regular one-on-one/group meetings of freshmen with tutors to develop time management and study skills, to gain an understanding of their personal learning style, to learn how to prioritize their learning goals and to identify their strengths and weaknesses; • One-on-one meetings with personal health and wellbeing counselors upon request to develop self-awareness, self-management, and self-discipline; • One-on-one/group meetings with career advisors to create CVs, to develop job search strategies and to learn how to apply for job vacancies, to do networking, to prepare for job interviews.

Priority 3:

The physical layout of the Student Services should be modified to provide the best environment for students (Strange, 2003).

• Create a one-stop shop service space;
• Regularly evaluate staff to ensure of providing appropriate service;
• Provide professional development training to staff;
• Examine equipment and computer needs to reach best possible effectiveness;
• Create an online student platform for offering integrated interactive online services:
  – To provide information, tools, and resources to support and improve the delivery and management of education to students
  – An online student platform should meet all technical requirements including personal emails, online learning tools, and library for the student body to receive university operational information to achieve maximum efficiency (Mohammed et al., 2021).
• All functions of the online platform should be regularly tested by the IT desk to ensure changes.
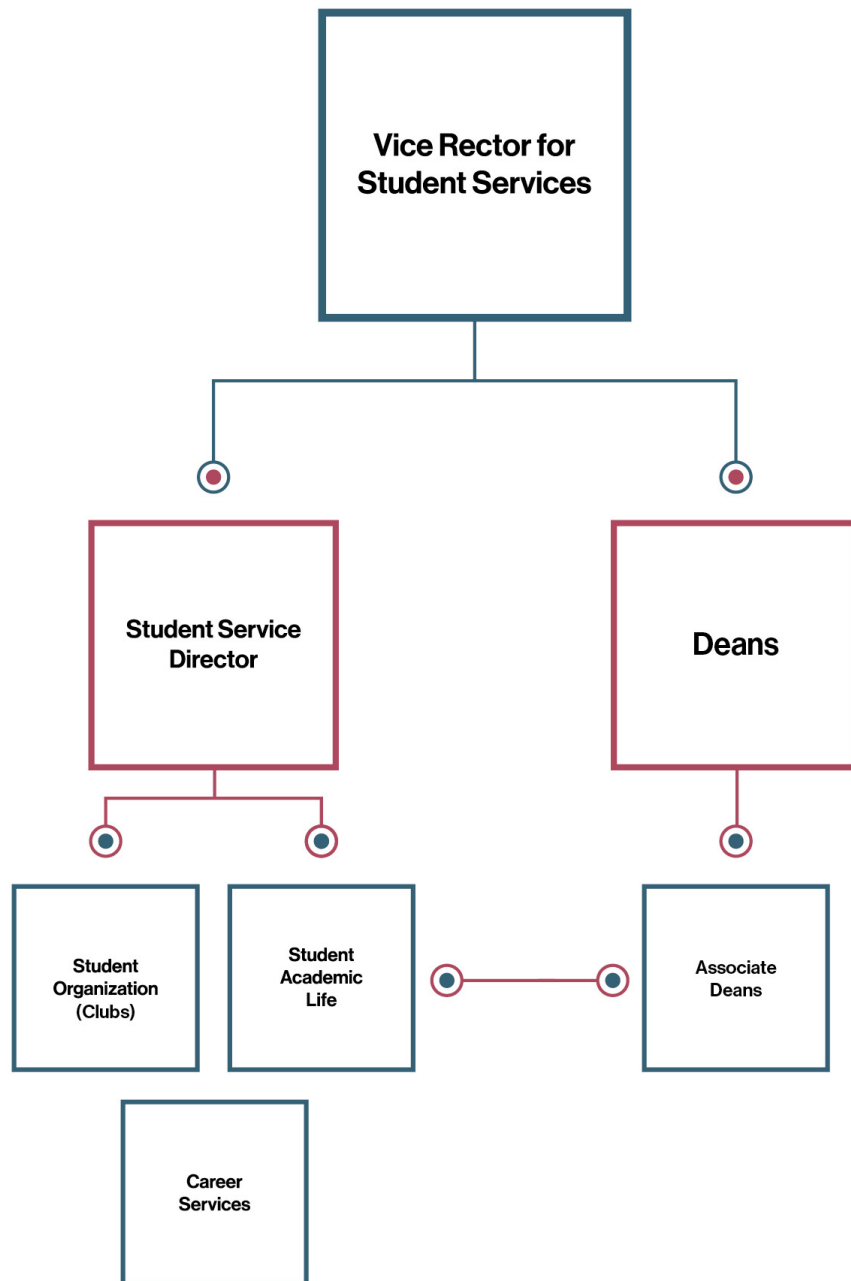
Priority 4:

Student services staff should be involved in professional development training and certification programs so that they are able to provide comprehensive student service to help students succeed (Walker, 2016). The expertise level of student services staff should be assessed to ensure that appropriate service is provided (Prebble et al., 2004).

• To welcome newly recruited student services staff members and support them should be done during an induction which assists in adjusting to their new roles and working environments.
• Induction materials based on a standard departmental document include general introductory information about the student services as starting a new job is a stressful experience for newly recruited staff members and they need help to settle in. All materials related to induction should be available on the student services web pages.
• New staff members should be given an induction training plan. The plan is designed for specific job responsibilities and outlined in the position description of student services staff.
• An informal mentor may be assigned to assist with new staff members' integration into the working environment (Guidelines (ed.gov)).
• General advising training and certification programs should be offered to support student services professionals throughout freshman advising. The program should provide student services professionals with foundational advising knowledge, skills, and context (citation).

Division structure

Vice Rector for Student Services

Student Service Director

Deans

Student Organization (Clubs)

Student Academic Life

Associate Deans

Career Services

University of Central Arkansas (2013-2018).

Mission

Supporting students in reaching their maximum potential and achieving their academic goals.

Strategic Map

Limestone University (2021).

Michigan Department of Education. Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (2016).

SWIFT Education Center (2016).

Values

• Student Success;
• Partnerships;
• Innovation;
• Employee Potential.

Motto

Make a change.

Integration

It could be a more modern university focusing on student services.

Growths & Performance

It could be the university with efficient decision-making and effective operations, quality services and a dedicated and diverse workforce.

Learning Innovation

It could be a place of choice for creative workers, tutors, educators, students and researchers.

All Students

Academic Development

• Improve Academic Outcomes

• Reduce Academic Failure and Dropouts

• Grow Programs and Partnerships

Small Group

Emotional Connection and Learning

• Improve Learning Environment

• Increase Motivation

• High Interest

Freshmen

Positive Behavior

• Improve Efficiency and Accountability

• Adaptation

• Support Students

Perspectives	Strategic Objectives
Students **University Administration** **Community**	• Increase Academic Development • Improve Outcomes • Reduce Failure
Internal Processes	• Improve Efficiency & Accountability • Improve Quality • Development Programs & Partnerships • Enhance Innovation
Organizational Capabilities (People, Facilities, Technology)	• Improve Working Conditions • Improve Satisfaction • Optimize University Services • Providing Tech Facilities

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Chapter 6: Conclusion

This qualitative interview-based study aimed to explore student services in three public universities in Azerbaijan with the aim to investigate freshmen's perceptions about them. Our team strived to identify the roles and responsibilities of student services administration and representatives.

The study findings informed kinds of support student services provided so that freshmen's academic development could be fostered. The study also added to our understanding of how freshmen perceived the roles and responsibilities of tutors and Deputy Deans/Student Services Representatives. The findings led to acknowledge benefits of academic support provided by tutors while delivering tutoring and assistance offered by Deputy Deans/student service representatives .

Literature suggested tutoring as a process to improve tutees' learning by promoting their understanding of course content, problem-solving abilities, and communication skills and as part of student services. Tutoring may have helped students develop a stronger desire to learn. While tutoring and tutors may have benefited students and educational institutions, they could also pose some challenges, particularly if the tutors' and administrations' roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined, supported, and monitored. Besides, in cases when universities were missing either student services as a well-organized and unified structure, it may have impeded freshmen's academic development.

Recommendation

The reviewed literature as well as the findings of this study provided necessary insights into how tutors and student services representatives acknowledged their roles and responsibilities, as well as how freshmen perceived the roles and responsibilities of tutors and student services representatives. The data also revealed some difficulties associated with the structure of the student services. It may have been advisable to establish a well-organized student service division to meet freshmen's academic needs which may maximize the potential benefits of academic development at selected Universities.

The Capstone team reached the conclusion that providing tutors with the necessary training was preferable them to understand their roles and responsibilities. Although some tutors stated that they had received some training, it turned out that it was not given by a professional, but by other more experienced tutors working at the university. It would be more efficient, if tutors could obtain training from more experienced trainers in their field.

Tutors and student representatives also stated that there was no well-established manual to follow. Thus, it might be more beneficial to provide the tutors with comprehensive guideline. Another recommendation that our capstone team suggest is to implement an online platform so that both students and tutors can track freshmen's academic performance and ensure their progress throughout their university life.

Apart from that, taking freshmen's recommendations into account, an online library should be available for students so that they would not need to physically visit the library.

According to our findings, since the selected public universities do not have a unified, centralized student services division to help students with their academic difficulties, as well as lack of caring, helpful, and student-centered environment. It would be useful to set up certain standards and strategies to strengthen the suggested student service division.

Moreover, considering the interviewers' suggestion it might have been favorable to for public universities to install and activate the upgraded software system for the reason of optimize the functions of the student services division.

Our capstone product will include proposal for the strategic planning of the student services division- the structure, the objectives, priorities, development plan, strategic roadmap. We intent to present our Strategic plan proposal for student services division for the university administration board at public universities in Azerbaijan.

All the above suggestions would help to establish and organize the work of student services as a unified division in all three public universities. As a result, the student services department might take recommended steps.

Appendix A. Informed Consent

Date:

Name of Participant:

Study Name: The Role of Student Services in Freshmen's Academic Development at Azerbaijan Public Universities.

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Purpose of the Research: The purpose and objectives of our Capstone project include investigating freshmen's perceptions of student services in three public universities and exploring the roles and responsibilities of student services representatives, identifying the challenges that freshmen face, and determining the role of student services in their academic development in public universities.

Participants' responsibilities: Participants will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview and answer the researcher's questions.

Benefits of Research: The researcher believes that investigating student services and freshmen's perceptions of those services could help to establish a unified form of student services in the organization, as well as contribute to freshmen's academic development in public universities.

Withdrawal from the Research: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to participate or do not answer a specific question, your relationship with the researcher will not be harmed; all information will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: The researcher will only record interviews with your permission. Your identity will be kept private, and all responses will remain anonymous. Only the researcher will have access to the research data.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research, please feel free to contact us by e-mail (saghja-valizada13394@ada.edu.az, fabdullazada@ada.edu.az, ggojal-i13313@ada.edu.az).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, *(fill in your name here),* consent to participate in *(insert study name here)* conducted by *(Gunay, Fatma, Sevinj)*. I have understood the purpose of this project and want to participate. By signing below, I indicate my consent.

Signature_____   Date_____

Participant_____

Signature_____   Date_____

Principal Investigator

, (fill in your name here), agree to allow video and/or [digital images or photographs] in

which I appear to be used in teaching, scientific presentations, and/or publica-

tions with the understanding that I will not be identified by name. I am aware

that I may withdraw this consent at any time without penalty.

Signature_____   **Date**_____

Participant_____

Appendix B. Interview Protocol for Freshmen

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this research on student services at public universities. The goal of this research is to look into the structure of student services and freshmen's perceptions of student services in public universities. The questions will be related to the research objectives, such as investigating the types of support that student services provide to develop freshmen's academic excellence, as well as the experience and perception of student services, and discovering the emerging structure of student services in public higher educational institutions.

Please understand that your participation is entirely voluntary, and you have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. Furthermore, you are encouraged to share any document that you believe is relevant and can help develop knowledge upon it. I will remove your name and personal information to protect the participant's/your identity. Do you agree with me recording your responses for later review? NO or YES

1. Opening questions:

Name and surname

Gender

2. Was it difficult for you to transition to college? If yes, how did your university guide you during the transition period (1st term) from secondary school to university?

3. What did you struggle most during the transition period to adapt to the university environment?

- setting goals and working toward them

- building relationship with the classmates and faculty

- communicating with others

- handling stressful circumstances

- solving conflicting problems

- classroom participation

- demonstrate empathy for others

- making decisions related to behavior, ethics, and safety

4. Do you think that you belong to this university? If so, how? Be specific and elaborate on.

5. What do you like most about your academic life?

6. What academic support does your university provide you?

7. Is there any student services office or division in your respective university? If yes, how is it called and what services does it offer for students? Be specific and name a few of these services.

8. What opportunities does the student services office/division provide in order to improve your learning that is gaining knowledge or skill, practicing skills, or experiencing something?

9. What challenges related to your course content have you faced during the first term in the university? Please, name at least three challenges.

11. Who do you ask for help when you have difficulties/concerns with your academic performance?

12. What social activities does the student services office/division provide for freshmen?

13. What would you like to see changed in student services related to your academic development?

Appendix C. Interview Protocol for University Administrators

Thank you for participating in this Capstone project at public universities. The purpose of this study is to investigate the structure of student services in public universities and the perceptions of first-year students regarding these services. The questions will focus on university student services and their impact on academic development.

Please note that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. The duration of the interview will approximate one hour.

In addition, it is suggested that you share any documents that you deem relevant and that can assist you in expanding your understanding of the topic. To protect your anonymity, both the document you submit, and your responses will remain confidential. Prior to this interview, meetings were held with university administration, and all information will be held in strict confidence with their permission. All state universities will be presented with the study's findings. Are you okay with me recording your responses for later review? Please respond honestly and completely to the questions.

Gender

 Age

1. What position do you hold, and how many years have you been in this position?

2. How do you describe your job and responsibilities?

3. Can you tell me about your educational experience and the training or preparation you have received for your current position?

4. Generally speaking, what qualities and competencies do you think are most important for your position?

5. What resources, methods, or techniques are available to provide these services?

6. What do you see as the purpose of student services at your university and how does your university guide freshmen during the transition period (1st term) from secondary school to university?

7. What do freshmen struggle most during the transition period to adapt to the university environment?

setting goals and working toward them

building relationship with the classmates and faculty

communicating with others

handling stressful circumstances

solving conflicting problems

classroom participation

demonstrate empathy for others

making decisions related to behavior, ethics, and safety

8. What services related to freshmen's academic development does the student services office/division provide at your university? What technologies, resources, and tool/s do you use to help freshmen?

9. Is there any mechanism in your university being used to define students who need academic support? If yes, please name some of them.

10. How do you communicate with the freshmen?

You talk less and listen more.

You ask questions or freshmen do.

You watch and respond to the freshmen's body language.

Show the freshmen that you are really listening and that you care.

you give the freshmen feedback.

11. Can you describe an experience where you identified the academic needs of freshmen and successfully developed a way to guide them? If yes, please be specific and elaborate on.

12. What opportunities does the student services office/division provide in order to improve freshmen's learning that is gaining knowledge or skill, practicing skills, or experiencing something? Please, be specific and give examples.

13. What challenges related to the freshmen course content may be during the first term in the university? Please, name at least three challenges.

14. Who helps when freshmen have difficulties with the subject knowledge?

15. Who should freshmen ask for help when they have difficulties/concerns with their academic performance?

16. What social and educationally purposeful activities does the student services office/division provide for freshmen?

17. How does your university support you to update your skills? What kind of professional development opportunities does your respective university provide you?

18. How do you communicate with your colleagues in the student services office/division and do you think this communication and collaboration change your interests and competencies?

19. Do you cooperate with the representatives of student services from other universities? If yes, how do you communicate and to what extent this cooperation changes your interests and competencies?

20. What would you like to see changed in student services related to freshmen's academic development?

Appendix D. Figures & Charts

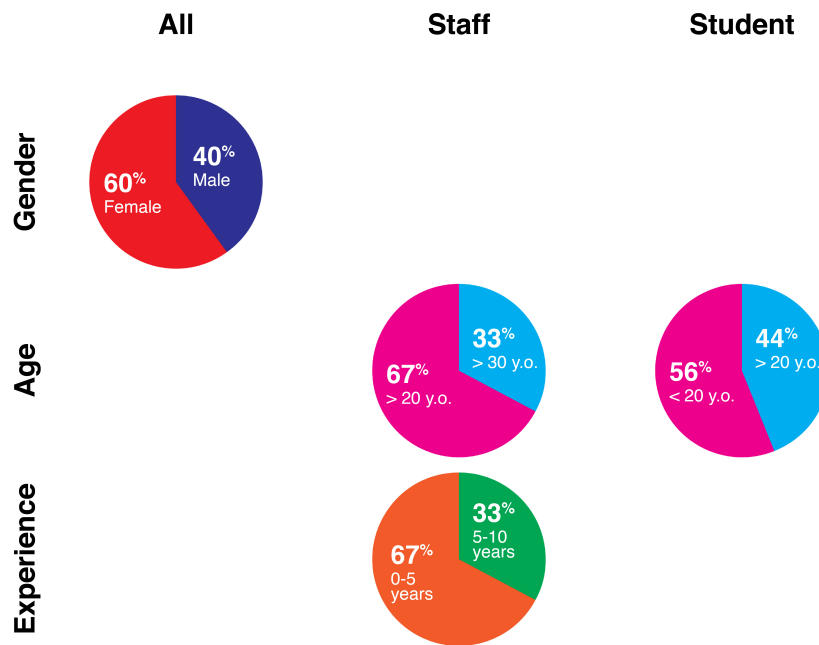Figure 1. Gender indicator of freshmen.

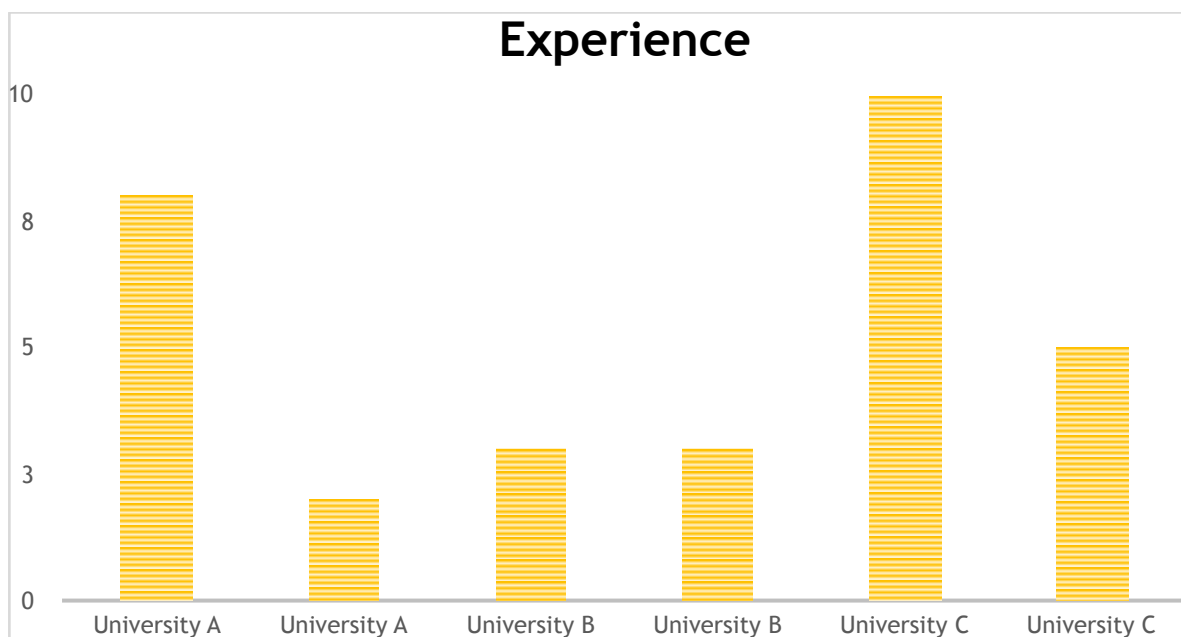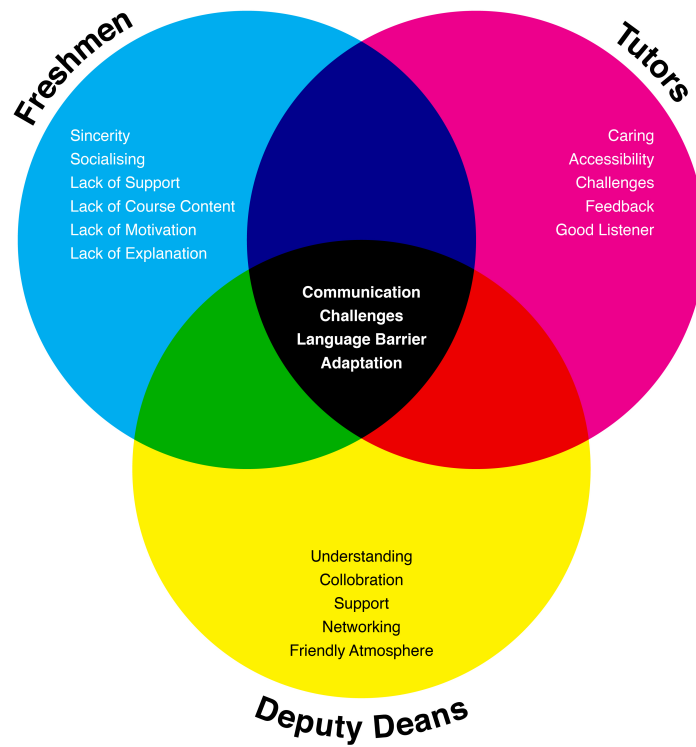Figure 2. University representatives' experience in the field.

Chart 1. Examples of words used to define student services.

Freshmen
Tutors
Deputy Deans

Sincerity
Socialising
Lack of Support
Lack of Course Content
Lack of Motivation
Lack of Explanation

Caring
Accessibility
Challenges
Feedback
Good Listener

Communication
Challenges
Language Barrier
Adaptation

Understanding
Collobration
Support
Networking
Friendly Atmosphere

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