



Best Educational E-Practices (BEEP)

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Benchmarking St. Petersburg Junior College: A Report to Leadership Project Eagle Evaluation Question #1

What Are the Appropriate Models for Development and Redevelopment of Student Support Services?

Executive Summary

“...a ‘best practice’ institution is not synonymous with the ‘world’s best’ institution. Every institution faces challenges and strives for improvement in many areas.”
([Benchmarking As a Research Methodology](#), Council for Adult and Experiential Learning)

Introduction

In 1999, [St. Petersburg Junior College](#) (SPJC) received a multi-year federal grant ([Project Eagle](#)) to build a national model for increasing access to four-year degrees and workforce training for students attending community colleges. Access would be enhanced by increasingly flexible educational opportunities – with courses, programs and support services delivered at a time and place, in a way and at a pace, best suited to the needs of the individual learner.

Part of Project Eagle is an evaluation of e-learning practices at the college, using a series of six critical questions formulated by the Project Eagle Working Group and shaped into a [plan](#) by the project’s external evaluator. The evaluation for the first question began with an examination of the best e-learning practices related to that question, both nationwide and worldwide, using the Web as the primary source of information. The results were published in [Best Educational E-Practices \(BEEP\), Issue #2, November 1, 2000, Student Support Services to Distance Learners.](#)

Then a list of all practices related to the question currently in use at SPJC were compiled and compared to those included in [BEEP #2](#). A [report](#) was prepared benchmarking SPJC, and the results submitted to the college leadership. This is a summary of the findings and recommendations of that report.

Background

In October 2000, research was completed to find external models of student support services to “distance learners.” That phrase eventually changed to “e-learners” or “e-students,” as research showed increased use of these terms to define the student population being examined.

The identified services included the basics (admission, registration, payment of fees, financial aid, textbook purchase, and library services). Above and beyond that were online directories or handbooks of services arranged on a comprehensive Web page or site; self-assessment tools for distance learning readiness; online orientations to distance learning; hardware requirements for distance courses; counseling services; tutorial services; compendia of frequently asked questions; and other unique online support services of note.

After these external best practices were published in [BEEP #2](#) in November, steps were taken to evaluate the level of e-student support services at SPJC. Techniques for that evaluation included creation and administration of a [student survey of online instruction](#); examination of all current student services of the college’s E-Campus; informal dialogue between the Cyber Advisor and selected e-learners; and invitation to online faculty to submit innovative ideas and suggestions for improvement.

Results

The results were divided into three categories, [charted](#) in a simple comparison of student support services offered by other institutions and by SPJC. (Highlighted text will link to SPJC Web pages with the corresponding information.)

- I. Best practices reported in [BEEP #2](#) offered both by other schools and SPJC include these:
 - A. [Basic services](#) (SPJC home page)
 - B. [Online directories and handbooks of services](#)
 - C. [Self-assessment for distance learning readiness](#)
 - D. [Orientation to distance learning](#)
 - E. [Hardware requirements for distance courses](#)
 - F. [Counseling services](#)
 - G. Tutorial services (E-Campus [bulletin board](#) and pilot-test of [smarthinking.com](#))
 - H. [Frequently asked questions](#)
 - I. [Career services](#)
 - J. [Bulletin board](#)
 - K. [Sample placement tests*](#)
 - L. Sample online lessons* (In process – available in late spring 2001)
- II. Best practices reported in [BEEP #2](#) at other institutions and not offered by SPJC
 - A. Digital student newspaper*
 - B. Student union station*
 - C. News articles about the distance learning program*
- III. Best practices offered by SPJC and not found at other schools when researching student support services for [BEEP #2](#)
 - A. [Collegewide online survey of student satisfaction with e-learning](#)
 - B. [Online student testimonials](#)
 - C. [Links to outside agency support services](#) – Links from the Cyber Advisor's page
 - D. [Telecourse instructions](#)
 - E. [Student orientation CD](#)
 - F. [Instructions for offsite testing](#)
 - G. Individual instructor innovations, beyond chat rooms or message/discussion boards, such as
 1. Use of good students identified from former classes to work as online student interns/assistants
 2. Extra credit assignments that encourage use of the Internet to find the answers
 3. Use of telephone to get information and answers out quickly
 4. Effective use of group projects to increase inter-student online communication
 5. Creation of special Web pages, e.g., course orientation and navigation
 6. Flexible method of online delivery: email for essays and direct student/teacher correspondence; discussion board for weekly postings of assignments and discussion

*Other unique and creative ideas for online services of relatively minor importance.

Review and Recommendations

The quantity and quality of support services for e-learners offered by SPJC fared well against the external best practices identified in [BEEP #2](#), usually equal to and frequently surpassing them. Any absence of services was more than compensated for by the long list of additional ones the college has created, and continues to add, that were not readily identifiable at other institutions surveyed in October 2000.

SPJC's online instructors indicated, however, that many e-students were either not aware or not taking advantage of what is available to them. Although the E-Campus Web site is exemplary, there is a need for more visibility and promotion of it as a central and complete resource for e-students, and of the Cyber Advisor as their personal - and primary - contact point at any time in their e-learning careers.

www.spjc.edu/eagle/BEEP/BEEP6.htm

For the full report, go to www.spjc.edu/eagle/PEEQ1.htm

For a subscription to BEEP, contact the editor: burkhartj@spjc.edu