

Award Title

Optimizing Technology to Increase Non-Traditional Student Engagement & Bring Drexel Co-Curricular Programming to Students Worldwide

Awards Categories

Off-Campus, Commuter, Non-traditional, Graduate, Professional and related

Executive Summary

The retention of off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, and professional students begins with engagement. As shared by Vincent Tinto (1993), “Every student who arrives on campus must feel that they are valued and full members of the community.” The Office of Student Life at Drexel University transcends this quote by Tinto through its work and commitment to “all” students – even students in our online programs who may never come to campus until graduation.

Drexel’s Office of Student Life works collaboratively with thirteen colleges and schools as well as the Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento, California to innovatively develop “social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members” (Tinto, 1993). Using a myriad of technology platforms, the Office of Student Life is “bringing the Drexel campus” to off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, professional, blended, and online students through innovative programming such as Online First-Year Experience, Virtual Tea Orientations, Creating Excellent Organizations (CEO) Leadership series, Second Life Luau, Virtual Wine & Cheese Lectures, etc. Additionally, the Office of Student Life works closely with the Office of the Provost so that students locally, regionally, nationally, and globally are able to “virtually” participate in campus events such as convocation, presidential speeches, and graduation through webcasts.

The Office of Student Life is also working with Alumni Development to webcast events during alumni weekend this year to creatively bring on-campus co-curricular programming to Drexel University alumni, particularly alumni from our off-campus, commuter, graduate, professional, blended, and online programs. Currently, the Office of Students Life is partnering with the Office of the Provost and several colleges and schools in writing two grants. The first grant is focused on increasing the accessibility of online events for students with visual and hearing disabilities. The second grant is focused on integrating new technologies within the Office of Student Life’s conference rooms so that student organizations can webcast their meetings so students who do not live close to campus or who are enrolled in online programs can actively participate. Through collaborative campus partnerships and harnessing new technologies, Drexel University’s Office of Student Life is ensuring that every student who enrolls in a Drexel program feels “that they are valued and full members of the community” from point of matriculation through graduation.

Award Description

It is truly an honor to nominate Drexel University's Office of Student Life for the NASPA Excellence Awards for the category of "Off-Campus, Commuter, Non-traditional, Graduate, Professional and related." Drexel's Office of Student Life works collaboratively across campus with thirteen colleges and schools as well as the Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento, California to provide innovative on-campus and online co-curricular programming. This nomination is in recognition of the exemplary work of the Office of Student Life in developing programs and events to socially and academically connect off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, professional, blended, and online students to Drexel University from matriculation through graduation.

The Office of Student Life is deeply committed to the institutional mission. When carefully reading Drexel University's mission statement, it is evident that the Office of Student Life strategically supports the mission through its annual programming for students.

Drexel University's mission statement: To serve our students and society through comprehensive integrated academic offerings enhanced by technology, co-operative education, and clinical practice in an urban setting, with global outreach embracing research, scholarly activities, and community initiative.

The institutional mission begins with the words "serving our students and society" which is truly the focus and heart of student life at Drexel University. The Office of Student Life provides extensive programming throughout the academic year to serve our students as well as to engage them in society through community service activities and initiatives. The mission statement then emphasizes that the University serves our students and society "through comprehensive integrated academic offerings enhanced by technology, co-operative education, and clinical practice." The Office of Student Life works collaboratively with Drexel University's colleges and schools to harness available technologies that can be used to engage and connect off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, professional, blended, and online students who may infrequently come to campus because of work, family commitments, etc., or who may never come to campus until graduation because they are enrolled in online programs. The Office of Student Life is also one of Drexel's greatest supporters of co-operative education. In fact, the Office of Student Life has partnered with the Master of Science in Higher Education Program to provide on-campus and online co-op placement opportunities for non-traditional graduate students. The mission statement concludes by focusing on how Drexel University serves our students "in an urban setting, with global outreach embracing research, scholarly activities, and community initiative." Through on-campus programming, the Office of Student Life is serving Drexel students in its urban setting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In regards to global outreach, the Office of Student Life is utilizing technology such as webcasting with Adobe Connect, Wimba Classroom, Polycom, and MediaSite to bring events to students regionally, nationally, and globally. This is particularly important for engagement with our blended and online students since a large percentage of this student population does not live close to campus. Lastly, the Office of Student Life is actively involved in developing best practices that build upon research, support scholarly activities, and foster community.

To further support the outstanding work of the Office of Student Life, I will provide a snapshot of the work they are involved in on the (a) program-level, (b) college/school-level, and (c) university-level. It should be noted that the three letters of support with this nomination submission provide much more detail regarding the current programs and initiatives of the Office of Student Life.

Program-Level Success – The Office of Student Life works closely with the Master of Science in Higher Education (MSHE) program. Since this graduate degree program is offered fully online, it is essential that students feel connected both in and outside of the classroom. Therefore, the MSHE program and Office of Student Life have developed online events, including an Online First-Year Experience, to engage students throughout their enrollment. Over the past five years, the online MSHE program has grown from 26 students to over 200 students who live in the United States and abroad. The overall retention rate from 2005 to 2009 has ranged from 80% to 84% which is very high since online retention rates are often published in the literature as 50% to 60%. The Office of Student Life is also working closely with a newly launched Doctorate of Education (EdD) program that is offered in Philadelphia, PA; Harrisburg, PA; and Sacramento, CA. Recognizing that the national doctoral completion rate is reported to be approximately 50%, the Office of Student Life is proactively working with the EdD program to provide co-curricular programming to engage and retain doctoral students.

College/School Level Success - Online and blended enrollments represent the greatest growth within some of the colleges and schools at Drexel University. At the Goodwin College of Professional Studies, online and blended student enrollments now outpace on-campus student enrollments. Therefore, the Office of Student Life is working with Goodwin College to develop co-curricular programming to provide online and blended students with opportunities to connect to Drexel University. In September 2010, Goodwin College launched for the first time an Online First-Year Experience (OFYE) for 15 of its online and blended programs in collaboration with the Office of Student Life. The first OFYE event was a Virtual Tea Orientation. A total of 490 mailed invitations with sachets of tea were sent to Goodwin students. The Virtual Tea Orientation was held twice during the second week of classes and a total of 206 students attend the Tea representing a 42% attendance rate for this event. Upcoming OFYE events for AY2010-11 include a Winter Fireside Chat with a Leadership Panel, a Spring Graduation Celebration, a Summer Second Life Luau, and a Virtual Wine & Cheese Lecture Series.

University-Level Success - The Office of Student Life offers extensive programming and events throughout the year for off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, professional, blended, and online students. One of the most recognized programs at Drexel University is the Creating Excellent Organizations (CEO) Leadership series. Through a collaborative partnership with the LeBow College of Business, the Office of Student Life hosts a leadership development series that provides Drexel students with skills to succeed professionally, academically, and personally. The CEO Leadership series is offered on-campus but is webcast so students who are unable to come to campus can still participate. The Office of Student Life has also developed innovative strategies to optimize student engagement opportunities for Drexel University's main campus and other Drexel sites such as the Center for Graduate Studies in Sacramento, California. A signature event celebrating Latino Heritage Month is offered through the Office of Student Life is *Éxito Latino/Latino Success: Dream it – Live it with Drexel University!* This annual event

connects students both on-campus and online with nationally renowned Latino speakers who present as part of a panel on Drexel's Philadelphia main campus and on site at the Sacramento Center for Graduate Studies.

The Office of Student Life continuously seeks ways to support Drexel University's mission. Currently, the Office of Student Life is collaborating with the Office of the Provost on the submission of two grants. One grant focuses on increasing the accessibility of online events for students with visual and hearing disabilities. The second grant focuses on integrating new technologies within the Office of Student Life's conference rooms so that student organizations can webcast their meetings so students who do not live close to campus or who are enrolled in online programs can actively participate. Through collaborative campus partnerships and harnessing new technologies, Drexel University's Office of Student Life is innovatively developing programming to engage off-campus, commuter, non-traditional, graduate, professional, blended, and online students from point of matriculation through graduation.

Assessment Data

The fully online Master of Science in Higher Education (MSHE) program has been working collaboratively with Drexel University's Office of Student for over five years to develop innovative co-curricular programming to engage online students who live within the United States and abroad. In spring 2007, the MSHE program developed and piloted an Online First-Year Experience (OFYE) program for newly matriculated graduate students with assistance from the Office of Student Life. The OFYE experience was very well embraced by the students has become part of the program. Based on the very positive student data collected from the MSHE students regarding engagement, the OFYE is now being offered across 15 non-traditional blended and online programs in the Goodwin College of Professional Studies.

Assessment Data – MSHE Program & Office of Student Life:

In June 2009, an MSHE Student Survey was distributed to 186 students enrolled in the MSHE program in spring Quarter 2009 to assess engagement and satisfaction. A total of 114 students responded representing a 62 percent response rate. Highlights from the survey results are included below reflecting that online students are seeking flexible programming and opportunities to connect with faculty, adjunct faculty, and their peers through academic and social engagement opportunities.

Top Three Reasons for Enrolling in Drexel University's MSHE program:

1. Flexibility (69 percent) 2. Need the degree for career advancement (57 percent), and 3. Curriculum (49 percent) and national reputation (49 percent).

Feeling connected to Drexel University:

- 69 percent of the students stated they felt connected and very connected to the faculty and adjunct faculty
- 67 percent stated they felt connected and very connected to students in their cohort

Student Satisfaction:

- 67 percent of the students stated they are very satisfied and satisfied (25 percent) w/the program

Quality of MSHE Program:

- 50 percent of the students stated the online MSHE program offers the same quality of courses than on-campus programs in which they had previously attended • 43 percent of the students stated the online MSHE program offers higher academic quality of courses than on-campus programs in which they had previously attended

Recommend the MSHE Program:

- 97 percent of the students stated they would recommend the MSHE program to individuals seeking to advance their career in higher education • 91 percent stated they would recommend the MSHE program to individuals seeking to transition into higher education

Career Advancement/Transition

- 30 percent of students were promoted or transitioned to new positions while enrolled in the program

Online First-Year Experience for Non-Traditional Students

- 78 percent of the students stated that the Online First-Year Experience is important and very important for student engagement • 68 percent of the students stated that the Online First-Year Experience is important and very important for student retention • 61 percent of the students stated that the Online First-Year Experience should be required

Note: Assessment data relating to student engagement and the participation of the 15 blended and online programs in the OFYE will be collected in 2011.