

ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTERS AT US UNIVERSITIES AS AN EFFECTIVE FACTOR IN ENSURING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Annotation. The aim of the work is theoretical analysis of the peculiarities of the activity of the Academic Success Centers in the U.S. universities.

The methodological basis of the study are official websites of Academic Success Centers, scientific articles by Ukrainian and American researches and analytical reports.

Results. The article is devoted to a review of the activities of Academic Success Centers in U.S. universities. It is found that there is no single definition of «Academic Success Center» due to the variety of services offered. It is determined that Academic Success Center is a structural institution that provides academic and social-psychological support to students, helps to reveal their potential and prepare them for a career. The author emphasizes the technologies of support for students of higher education institutions. The main support technologies are tutoring, mentoring, academic coaching and Supplemental Instruction. It is proven that these technologies contribute to the improvement of the academic achievements of students and increase students' retention rate of the educational institution. Special emphasis is placed on the interaction of the Center with freshmen, who most often face a number of problems in a new academic environment for them. The Centers provide academic advising for students on choosing courses. Academic advising lasts from admission to graduation at the university. Moreover, Academic Success Centers provide an opportunity not only to learn, but also to teach. Seniors have the opportunity to become tutors, mentors and academic coaches. A special feature of Centers is career guidance work with applicants. Universities organize meetings of future first-year students with students, graduates, teachers and administration of the institution to provide complete information about admission, studies and further employment prospects.

Conclusions. The conducted study proved the need for further thorough research of the basic principles and areas of activity of centers of academic success in US universities in order to introduce better experience into educational practice.

Key words: Academic Success Centers, higher education, the USA, academic success, tutoring, mentoring, academic coaching, Supplemental Instruction.

1. Introduction.

In the conditions of the modern world, which is characterized by instability, unpredictability and turbulence, processes occur that affect all spheres of life. Education in this context plays a key role, as it is a guarantee of economic prosperity and military power of the country. In the report «The Changing Global Distribution of Highly Educated Manpower, 1950–2040: Findings and Implications, researchers» N. Eberstadt and E. Abramsky suggest that China and India will surpass the United States in the number of workers with higher education in the coming decades. Such a prospect of further development worries researchers, because the low educational productivity of the United States has direct consequences for national security [1]. Therefore, higher education institutions in

the USA face new challenges that require urgent solutions: attracting more applicants, increasing student retention rate and improving the quality of education. One of the possible answers to this challenge is the creation of Academic Success Centers in the U.S. universities, as structures that provide academic and socio-psychological support to students. Such centers have been operating in U.S. universities for two decades and have extensive experience.

2. Analysis of scientific publications.

Within this framework, in the article «The Student Success Center at Auburn University», American researchers N. McDaniel, G. Davis, J.B. James analyzed the theoretical and practical aspects of the activity of academic success centers in universities in the USA [14]. A team of researchers T. Adams, J.D. Osborne, R. Parlier in their study «Assessing Impact of Academic Interventions Through Student Perceptions of Academic Success» analyzed the impact of academic success centers on students' academic achievements [4]. Furthermore, this segment of scientific research is represented by modern Ukrainian studies of M. Bratko «Factors of academic success of future teachers: innovation, leadership» [6], O.Kozmenko «The experience of Student Success Centers' work in the USA» [11], S. Tsymbaliuk «Features of the Centers of Academic Success in US Universities» [18], I. Lytovchenko, Yu. Lavrysh, O. Chugai, O. Zelikovska «Academic Success Centers in U.S. universities in historical perspective and contemporary conditions» [12].

3. The aim of the work. To carry out a theoretical analysis of the peculiarities of the activity of the Academic Success Centers in the U.S. universities.

4. Review and discussion.

The federal constitution is the main law of the country. Statutes of the Constitution have an impact on the functioning of educational institutions, this is determined by Article 1, Section 10, 1, 4, 5, and 14 amendments. The provisions of Article 1, Section 8 are based on the assumption that a high level of education is necessary for the civic and economic prosperity of the nation. This means that improving education is about ensuring the general well-being of the United States. The 10th amendment to the US Constitution states that the state government is legally responsible for the control and direction of public education, that is, the state government has full authority to provide a system of public education [13].

The US government ensures equal access to education for all categories of the population. In this article, we will consider how this right is implemented in Academic Success Centers in the US universities and what kind of support these centers provide to students.

First of all, there is no single definition of this institutional phenomenon. Researchers define according to the main functions and variety of services which these centers provide for students.

Researchers from the University of Tennessee T. Adams, J. Osborn, R. Parlier define «Academic Success Center» as an institution that develops the culture of the university campus with the help of interested and capable students. Campus students are perceived as co-creators and designers of their own path to graduation, achieving future success in a global society [4].

Also, Academic Success Center is perceived as an organization that supports the efforts of institutions of higher education to develop targeted ways to help students achieve success and increase the level of academic achievement of students. The network of Academic Success Centers provides an opportunity to study and to share experience and information about innovations in institutions of higher education throughout the country for the purpose of implementing promising models of learning and management of the educational process. This definition was formulated by Auburn University researchers G. Davis, J.B. James, N. McDaniel [14].



Also Academic Success Center is considered as a resource for students' academic improvement. The Center conducts master classes and classes on learning strategies and time management, and also provides tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, academic coaching, and peer mentoring. Students are encouraged to gain new learning experiences, achieve academic goals, and take advantage of available resources that offered by the university campus. The Academic Success Center develops skills that improve academic performance and prepares students for lifelong learning. A comprehensive approach promotes mental and physical well-being, encouraging students to identify obstacles, set realistic goals and personally achieve them. This approach assumes that students should take responsibility for their education [3].

M. Bratko is a researcher from Ukraine defines Academic Success Centers as institutions which purpose is to develop and implement a coordinated strategy for improving education through multifaceted promotion of the academic success of students. A mission of the Centers is assistance to students in the comprehensive disclosure of their academic potential; enriched by the educational program with a deep and purposeful learning experience, obtaining skills that are necessary for life long learning [6].

So, Academic Success Center is an institutional phenomenon, which is created with the aim of increasing academic achievements and students' retention of the institution of higher education. Centers focus attention on freshmen (especially who are the first in the family who study at college/university), veterans, indigenous people, sportsmen etc.

Analyzing the activities of Academic Success Centers, it is worth noting that the best institutions of higher education in the United States of America have such institutions. The Times Higher Education (THE) resource, which ranks the world's best universities based on indicators that measure the effectiveness of the institution according to four criteria: teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook, presented an updated ranking of universities, which, of course, included the U.S. institutions of higher education. Researching the universities on this list, it is found that most of the top institutions have Academic Success Centers within their structure, although in some cases they may have their own names. For example, Harvard University has an Academic Resource Center, Princeton University has a McGrew Center, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology has an Office of the first year. All these centers were created for the purpose of academic support for students, providing various services aimed at improving educational achievements and increasing students' retention rate of the educational institution.

Researching Academic Success Centers at Ivy League top private and public universities in the US, totals 21. It is found that 15 of them have Centers and provide academic support services to students.

Active Student Success Centers share many characteristics. All centers have advisory boards that help develop strategic direction, but remain accountable to the governing board of the host association. So far, Academic Success Centers have been established in decentralized way without a system office [8].

Student Success Centers have a small staff, averaging about two full-time employees. The Center expands its staffing capacity with the help of consultants, faculty on leave from colleges, interns and, perhaps most importantly, existing staff in the host associations. They also expand their reach through partnerships with other organizations in the state (eg, associations of four-year colleges, K-12, and staffing agencies), although some of these partnerships are formal or contractual [8]. Academic Success Centers are also staffed by students who provide tutoring, mentoring, academic coaching, and more. To become a course teacher, a student needs to have a grade of at least B+ in the subjects that the student intends to teach, on a 100-point scale (used by Ukrainian universities) - this is 87-89 points. Candidates must demonstrate certain soft skills: problem-solving skills, critical thinking, attention to detail, etc. [7].

The main purpose of on-campus student employment is career preparation. It means that all students who are capable of mature behavior and responsible attitude to work, as well as university employees, work according to certain standards and job instructions. Because the workplace is a learning environment, supervisors and other office staff are considered teachers and can mentor,

support and encourage students both personally and professionally. The time that students spend at the workplace is preparation for independent life and professional activity. Working in the Academic Success Center, employees have an opportunity to increase their competence, engage in personal development, use innovative learning technologies, develop assessment processes that constantly inform planning and decision-making [10].

Most Academic Success Centers use the same set of learning technologies: academic coaching, mentoring, tutoring, and Supplemental Instruction. The complex of technologies in the centers may differ from each other.

The most common type of tutoring is peer tutoring. Topping K. defined peer tutoring as a process of teaching students from each other and with each other in a structured way under the supervision of a professional researcher or practitioner [17]. The essence of this technology is that senior students act as tutors and conduct classes to junior students (tutee). Tutoring serves as an additional source to the lectures, classroom and laboratory hours, and not as a replacement for them. During the course, students do not do their homework from their university disciplines, but get additional knowledge for different disciplines. Classes are held in group and individual forms. It is the group form of learning that promotes interaction and learning, so that students actively think, explain, solve problems and integrate their knowledge, thus clarifying their thinking and the learning process for themselves and others. One-to-one learning allows you to provide targeted and individualized assistance to students who want a more personalized learning experience. This form of learning is especially useful for students who need help with certain parts of the course.

Academic coaching is one of different types of coaching. According to J. Whitmore, one of the founders of coaching, coaching is the disclosure of a person's potential in order to maximize his effectiveness, that's why applying this technology in educational practice is appropriate and relevant. Coaching does not teach, but helps to learn [21]. Academic coaching helps identify and implement personal solutions to complex problems. The goal of academic coaching is to help the student to discover his potential and achieve optimal productivity [15].

M. Bratko defines coaching as a specific dialogical, praxeological method of learning, aimed at personal and/or professional development, in the process of which, due to the support provided by the coach, a person receives psychological and behavioral support which is necessary to achieve specific goals in the areas of life. The researcher emphasizes on promising effectiveness and research necessity of this technology [5].

Centers usually practice peer mentoring – a type of mentoring aimed at supporting the academic, professional and social growth of first- and second-year students [9]. This is a program where more experienced students (mentors) provide support and guidance to less experienced students (mentee). Mentors can help mentees in various areas such as studying, career, personal development and social adaptation. Mentors are usually senior students who have successfully mastered the curriculum of various specialties. Mentors and their mentees meet weekly to discuss a variety of topics such as: finding learning resources on campus, time management, sharing personal experience and overcoming difficulties, forming positive habits, setting goals, getting involved in campus life, etc. Peer mentors help students navigate the academic environment and celebrate new successes [16]. The advantage of peer mentoring is that seniors share their experience on certain academic issues, motivate and support freshmen and build an individual learning strategy [9].

One more efficient technology is Supplemental Instruction (SI) is an internationally recognized academic assistance program designed to help students navigate complex courses through additional exposure to course material and practice in a group setting. Supplemental Instruction involves regularly scheduled weekly review sessions led by a student who has successfully completed the course [20].

The article «The effectiveness of using student support technologies in Academic Success Centers at U.S. universities» confirms the effectiveness of using the technologies of tutoring, mentoring, academic coaching and Supplemental Instruction among students of higher education institutions.

The author analyzes the research data for each technology, which proves compliance with the purpose of use. While analysing the effectiveness of the technologies, data which reflect academic performance per semester and students' retention rate were taken into account. These data were compared between students who attended and students who did not attend the Center [19].

Academic advising provides comprehensive academic guidance throughout the years of your student career. Academic advising can last from admission to university graduation. Academic advisors help with course selection, choice of major, pre-professional pathways, research opportunities, and more. The Centers offer several advising programs according to the objective. It can be an advising program for freshmen, transfer students, undergraduate students, and those who plan to continue their studies after graduation. In addition, Academic Advising is responsible for implementing undergraduate academic policy, including reviewing academic progress, facilitating the return to university after time away, and adjudicating requests for exceptions [2].

Academic Success Centers are also open during the holidays. A model example of the work of the Center at Auburn University. The summer orientation program for freshmen and their parents (Camp War Eagle) is held in eight two-day sessions throughout the summer. The main purpose of this program is to introduce the history and traditions of the university, increase the awareness of future students with academic and social responsibilities, prepare them for university life, advise on academic issues and help with registration forms. During the meetings within the framework of this program for first-year students and their parents, meetings are held with students, graduates, teachers and employees of the educational institution, who share their impressions and advice on studying [13]. Such events allow applicants to orientate themselves in choosing a university and learn more «live» information about the university.

5. Conclusions.

Thus, the main indicator of a student's success in a higher educational institution is academic achievements. Academic Success Centers at U.S. universities' aim to support the academic achievement of students by providing a wide range of services. The Centers are open to applicants and university students, giving everyone the opportunity to express themselves and get help in different spheres. The Centers contribute to students retention, providing them with high-quality educational and social-psychological support services. The main technologies of student support are tutoring, academic coaching, mentoring and Supplemental Instruction. In addition, the Centers cooperate with future applicants and their parents on special career guidance programs. Successful senior students are actively involved in work in the centers as mentors of freshmen, both on the terms of paid work and on the basis of volunteering. All of the above learning approaches and technologies reveal the importance of Academic Success Centers in the U.S. universities.

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