# Your voice is being heard!

In an effort to provide an excellent student experience to Ashford University students, Ashford University continues to administer the Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey of Online Learners (PSOL). The latest survey was administered to the undergraduate and graduate students at Ashford University in the spring of 2013.

The survey measured student satisfaction with Ashford University services and identified areas of excellence and areas with opportunity for improvement.

The survey serves as a vehicle to evaluate how Ashford University is supporting its students in achieving their educational goals. In addition to measuring strengths and opportunities for improvement, the student satisfaction survey also reports areas in which Ashford University students report higher (and lower) satisfaction with University services than their peers at similar institutions. Ashford University students' satisfaction was significantly higher than the national student comparison group on every scale. Further, results indicate that Ashford students are more likely to recommend Ashford programs to other adult learners than students at other universities are to recommend their programs.

Survey results indicated the following areas as strengths regarding your experience at Ashford University:

- Instructional materials are appropriate for program content.

- Adequate online library resources are provided.

- Registration for online courses is convenient.

- I am aware of whom to contact for questions about programs and services.


Your positive input is sincerely appreciated!

Recognizing that an institution is only as strong as its weakest link, it is of paramount importance that we receive and respond to your input regarding ways that Ashford University can improve upon the overall student experience. The following areas were identified by Ashford students as areas of high importance, low satisfaction on the PSOL survey:

- Faculty are responsive to student needs.

- Faculty provide timely feedback and student progress.

- This institution responds quickly when I request information.

- I receive timely information on the availability of financial aid.

- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.

- The quality of online instruction is excellent.

How does your voice matter? Here's how!

Several of the concerns that students have voiced are regarding responsiveness and resources. It is important that everyone is aware of how Ashford University is taking action. Please see the examples below:

**<u>FINANCIAL SERVICES</u>**

Students entering school are often eager to pursue their dreams of graduating from college but frequently lack sufficient resources to fund their education. Ashford University works conscientiously to keep costs low to make school affordable for students to attend and reach their educational goals.

It is the University's goal to help every student clearly understand each payment option available to him or her and how the student will be impacted throughout each step of the financial process during his or her academic career. One of the resources we have in place to reach and educate our students about financial aid programs is [Financial Aid TV](). Ashford University also provides each new student with a Financial Services Welcome Call where he or she is provided in-depth information about his or her selected payment option(s) in a one-on-one setting with an assigned Financial Services Advisor. The Financial Services [Frequently Asked Questions]() (FAQs) on the Ashford website and the [Financial Information]() section of the Ashford University Academic Catalog are also great resources.

Privacy and convenience are top priorities to Ashford University. Improvements have been made to the tools that our students use when completing their financial aid documents. One of those tools is SFAonline, a secure site where students can go to conveniently upload required documentation. This tool enables Ashford University's Financial Aid Office to securely receive documentation and monitor a student's progression through the financial aid application process. Students who are eligible to apply for financial aid will be automatically enrolled into SFAonline and will receive an email with detailed instructions. Another tool is the IRS Data Retrieval Tool, which allows students and parents to access the IRS tax return information needed to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and transfer the data directly into their FAFSA from the IRS website. Ashford University highly recommends this tool for several reasons: it's the easiest way to provide your tax data, the best way of ensuring that your FAFSA has accurate tax information, and you won't need to provide a copy of your tax returns to your college.

Ashford University encourages responsible borrowing for all students and it is recommended that a student only borrow the amount of money needed to cover actual educational expenses. It is important to remember that any loans received must be paid back. To help with educational costs, students should seek out other funding sources such as scholarships. Tuition reimbursement is another great option for students to use and is offered by many employers. Students who are employed should check with their Human Resources Department to determine if this program is available to them. There are many options available for student loan repayment; a student should familiarize themselves with all options to ensure they are fully prepared to repay their loans when the time comes.

Ashford University knows this time in a student's life is exciting, and we are here to help guide every student through the process. All students at Ashford University are assigned a team of professional advisors dedicated to ensure their needs are being met every step of the way.

## ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

Two of Ashford University's strategic pillars are Academic Reputation and Student Learning and Success. Each of these pillars focus on the learning environment created by the faculty. In order for the learning environment to be effective, we rely on feedback received from assessment tools, such as the End of Course Survey (EOCS), Peer Reviews, and Instructional Specialist Rubric to help us understand the experience of our students and the effect that our instructors are having in the classroom. The EOCS poses questions that capture the student's overall experience in the classroom and thoughts about the effectiveness of the instructor. The Instructional Specialist uses the rubric to help the instructor focus on critical behaviors that can lead to student success. The Peer Review is used by the colleges to help faculty develop in areas of teaching instruction by using best practices in the classroom.

These data are used to support Student Learning and Success by enabling various departments in providing targeted professional development for the instructors. Professional development may consist of supporting the faculty with resources archived in the Faculty Resource Center, conducting webinars on specific topics, designing faculty forums led by experienced and successful faculty, and recommendations to attend professional conferences.

Academic Services, Faculty Affairs, Executive Deans, and Faculty are collaborating to create a new tool that allows Faculty to engage in their courses by observing their previous interactions and current engagement behaviors with students in their courses. This new tool is called FOCI (Faculty Observation of Course Information). Foci, plural for focus, is a Latin term that means a central point, attention, and/or activity. The FOCI metrics are aggregated in the tool and are shared with faculty to support their intentional interventions with students in their courses. Also, Quality Matters (QM) continues to assure the quality of the courses delivered by Ashford. The Faculty Development department offers learning opportunities in QM principles to Faculty and staff who are engaged in the design and development of the course curriculum.

Further, the data helps to determine the potential promotion of the instructor. An aspect of the Academic Reputation pillar is to strive for well-prepared graduates who have received high quality instruction. In order for these aspirations to be met, Ashford Faculty must be well informed about their disciplines and effective in presenting the content. It is Ashford's intent to promote instructors who have demonstrated these practices as well as others. To say that we listen to our students is an understatement. It is our students' feedback that helps Ashford create a learning environment that inspires our students and challenges our professoriate.

## LIBRARY SERVICES

The library launched a new feature that makes it much easier to find the articles, ebooks, and other resources that you need in order to do research for your courses. **FindIt@AU**, a new service on the library homepage, lets you search across multiple library databases at the same time. Here's a peek at this new service:
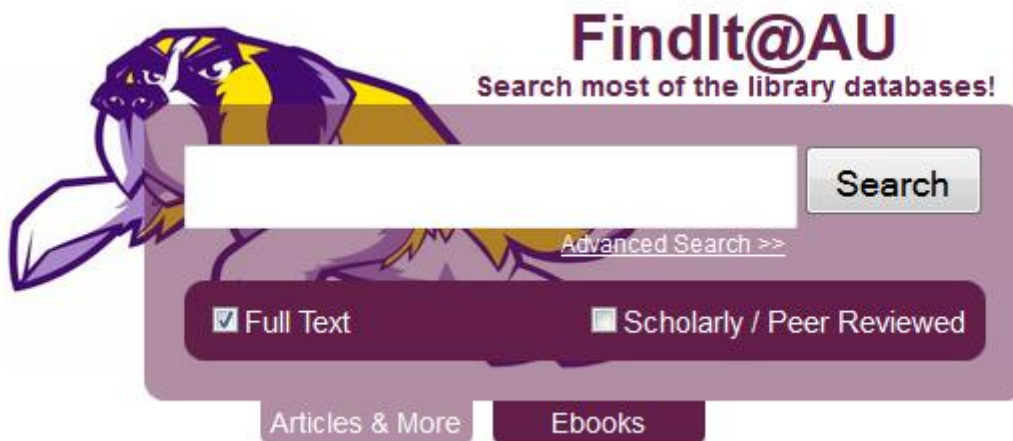


Our library website also offers numerous tutorials that will teach you how to use the library's resources and do research for your assignments. You can find these, and many more, on the library homepage and through the Getting Research Help page in the library:

- "Library Website Tour" (5 minute video)

- "Overview of FindIt@AU" (5 minute video)

- "Searching for Articles" (6 minute video)

- "Finding an Article When You Have the Citation" (4 minute video)

- "Peer Reviewed Articles" (slideshow)

- "Evaluating Web Resources" (slideshow)

The librarians have also created subject guides that will point you to useful resources in our library's collections *and* on the web. You can find these under the subject headings on the Databases by Subject page as well as a list of all the available subject guides through the Getting Research Help page. Here are just a few:

- Anthropology

- Early Childhood Education

- Entrepreneurship

- Health Care Administration

- History

- Literature

You have told us that you want access to more full text articles and multimedia resources, so we've been busy adding content to our electronic collection.

- EBSCOhost and ProQuest now retrieve full text articles by default. When you search, you will automatically get results that have the full article available to you immediately.

- Films on Demand is a huge collection of academic videos produced by BBC, PBS, National Geographic, History Channel, TED, and more.

- If you need primary source material, Empire Online is a great place to look. This interactive collection of historical documents comes from a wide range of reputable institutions, with a particularly strong core of documents and images from the British Library.

- ebrary, one of the library's largest collections of ebooks, now contains over 90,000 academic titles.

- Other additions to our collection include:

  Literary Reference Center (literature)
  AnthroSource (anthropology)
  PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, PsycCRITIQUES, and PsycBOOKS (psychology)
  DSM-5. (psychology)
  SAGE Journals Online (health sciences and healthcare administration)
  JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association (health sciences)

It's also easier than ever to get in touch with a librarian when you need help using the library's resources. We offer live chat office hours, a library phone number, and email address. Visit the library's website to see when the librarians are available. Just look for the "Questions? Contact Us" box on the right side of every page. Don't be shy about contacting us. We're here to help!

**<u>WRITING CENTER</u>**

Over the past year, Ashford University made its top priority the improvement of the Ashford Writing Center (AWC). Providing enhanced academic support (such as writing) was one of WASC's suggestions, and the

Ashford administration responded by funding a major project to re-design the current writing resources and hiring a professional staff of tutors (writing consultants) to interact directly with students. July 17 was the initial launch of the new [AWC website](#), and live tutoring will be phased in over the fall months.

The goal of the new Ashford Writing Center is to help students succeed in college by becoming stronger writers. They succeed because writing is a tool for learning. Effective college learning requires that students understand and analyze ideas, and that they communicate clearly through their writing. The AWC re-design incorporates several innovative new features that help students develop their writing skills.

First, the new AWC is easier to access and is more user-friendly. You no longer have to access the Writing Center through Constellation. The "Writing Resources" tab on the new AWC website provides most of the excellent handouts in Constellation, now available as downloadable PDF documents. In fact, most of the resources on the new website are available to the public.

Another improvement is offering tutoring for eligible Ashford students beginning in early September. Tutors offer feedback about writing strategies, development and organization of ideas, and correct documentation. Initially, students in Ashford's "gateway" courses (EXP 105, ENG 121 and 122, and PSY 202) will be eligible for tutoring help. Live Chat is available for quick questions (up to 15 minutes), and email paper review provides overall suggestions for revising a paper draft; however, the writing consultants do not correct papers, assist with exams, or discuss grades. Scheduled 30-minute appointments will also be phased in later this fall.

Finally, the AWC is developing a collection of tutorials and learning materials, and will host creative and educational writing events throughout the year. These events include the Ashford Creative Café for sharing creative writing, along with webinars responding to faculty, staff, and student demand for particular kinds of writing-related support. These and all AWC improvements support the University's belief that strong writers are more likely to thrive in their college experience and beyond in the world of work and civic responsibility.