

YOUR VOICE IS BEING HEARD!

In an effort to provide an excellent student experience to Ashford University students, Ashford University administered the Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey of Online Learners (PSOL) to the undergraduate and graduate students at Ashford University in the spring of 2011.

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 surveys also report 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:

- Student assignments are clearly defined in the syllabus.
- Registration for online courses is convenient.
- Adequate online library resources are provided.
- 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. In May 2011, Ashford University conducted focus groups with a random sample of undergraduate and graduate students. The focus groups were conducted to further evaluate the areas that were identified as areas of opportunity on the PSOL survey:

- The quality of online instruction is excellent.
- Faculty is responsive to student needs.
- Faculty provides timely feedback about student progress.
- This institution responds quickly when I request information.
- Adequate financial aid is available.
- Tuition paid is a worthwhile investment.

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:

WAYPOINT OUTCOMES

Using Waypoint, instructors are able to provide students with rich feedback through carefully constructed grading rubrics as well as in-text notations that identify specific areas for improvement. Quality feedback is an important part of the learning process for students. The other important feature of Waypoint is that the assignment criteria are carefully mapped to the program and institutional learning outcomes. As an institution, we are able to analyze the aggregate data and see how well students are meeting the learning outcomes for their programs of study. This information is used to make improvements to the curriculum. Ashford University is currently piloting Waypoint in several classes and anticipates that full-scale implementation will begin in fall 2011.

QUALITY MATTERS

Ashford also demonstrates dedication to quality through its Quality Matters (QM) implementation plan.

QM is a nationally-recognized, faculty-centered, peer review process designed to certify the quality of online courses and their components (<http://www.qmprogram.org/about>). Ashford is committed to having every one of its online courses evaluated and officially recognized by Quality Matters. In the evaluation, a team of three QM-certified reviewers uses a rubric composed of 40 national standards of best practice, research literature, and instructional design principles, to assess the quality of the course.

Ashford is the first in the nation to receive recognition for its institution-level plan, and currently has more QM-recognized courses than any other university in the world.

Further information regarding Quality Matters may be found at www.qmprogram.org.

STUDENT DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Ashford University always has provided students with dispute resolution options. To enhance students' choices and to provide swifter and more flexible dispute resolution tools, the University opened the Student Dispute Resolution Center (Center) on April 1, 2011. The services formerly offered through the Office of the Ombudsman and through the Office of Student Grievance Resolution transferred into the Center. Additionally, new services are offered through the Center that give students the option, in some instances, to participate in confidential mediation. The University provides a range of informal and formal dispute resolution paths and invites you to contact us if you have any questions (Dispute.Resolution@ashford.edu). Please also feel welcome to visit <http://ashford.edu/sdrc/>.

SOCIAL MEDIA

On November 23, 2010, Ashford University took the first step in a dynamic social media plan by launching official sites on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Associate Vice President of New Media, Brian Savarese explains, "These sites are designed to help students and alumni connect with each other and with the University." Because of our extensive online programs and our diverse alumni group, this connection is extremely important.

In the first few months following the launch, it became clear that this connection is both sought-after and valued by our students and alumni: more than 21,000 people “liked” the Facebook page, more than 1,700 opted to follow Ashford on Twitter, and the YouTube videos were viewed more than 20,000 times.

Through these avenues, Ashford is able to relay information about campus events such as the Clubs and Organizations Fair or the AIDS Awareness Walk, and also allow our distance learners to find information about upcoming Student & Alumni Networking Events. Ashford also posts links to student success stories, to the monthly editions of Ashford’s health and wellness magazine, Student Health 101, and to the monthly diversity articles associated with Ashford’s PAWs (Promoting Awareness and Wellness) initiative.

However, as Savarese rightly points out, “These pages are about more than just what’s happening at Ashford. Our students and alumni have proven to be a tremendous support system for each other.” Existing students are able to exchange information about financial aid and textbooks, as well as study tips and advice about choosing a major. In addition to the social support group that both current and former students share, alumni have found the site useful for professional networking. You can find other Ashford graduates in your area, swap stories and tips with alumni who are in your career field, or share professional techniques such as resume building and interview skills.

FINANCIAL AID TV

Ashford University has partnered with Financial Aid TV to deliver another source of financial aid knowledge to our students. We have put together a comprehensive library of answers to our students’ most frequently asked questions and delivered these in short dynamic online video segments. Our goal is to help provide our students with another source to gain financial aid knowledge in a format that is available to them 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The information on each video is set up to be presented in an easy to understand format that all students can be comfortable using. This type of technology being at our disposal makes it easier on both the financial services staff and the student to get the information they need without being restricted to our normal business hours.

Financial Aid TV can be accessed at <http://ashfordonline.financialaidtv.com/>.

If students have questions, comments or concerns related to their specific financial account, they can contact their Financial Services Advisor.