

A Study on Best Practices in Student Support and Progression

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Abstract: *With the fast changing time, the higher educational institutions are constantly evolving to fulfill their roles to cope up with the changes around. Periodically the evolutionary pace of progress is also disrupted by the need for more extreme and revolutionary makeovers. As the traditional students make way for becoming Gen-Z students, the incoming new generation increasingly holds expectations of access to advanced software and communication resources. The new aged pupils have been conditioned to having instant access to information and engaging in real time communication on a global scale. They are prone to taking action and are often willing to proceed without the base of theory. The education institutes now need to cater the needs of students not only on the academic front but also on various other grounds like socio economic front, administrative services, career guidance etc. Here evolves the concept of Student Support and Progression. In today's competitive era, it is difficult to find an institution that does not deliver some sort of program or services to assist academically disadvantaged students to a lack of guidance, indecisiveness, and poor placement scores, it has become critical for institutions to provide effective and outcome driven academic support programming that strongly encourages student involvement. In this study, the focus is on reviewing the forces behind change as well as exemplary innovations by educational institutions, especially with regard to student support and progression. In the later part, the paper aims to emphasize the role and the importance that student services have in improving students' academic experience, leading to a holistic growth.*

Key words: *revolutionary, communication resources, innovations, holistic growth.*

I. INTRODUCTION

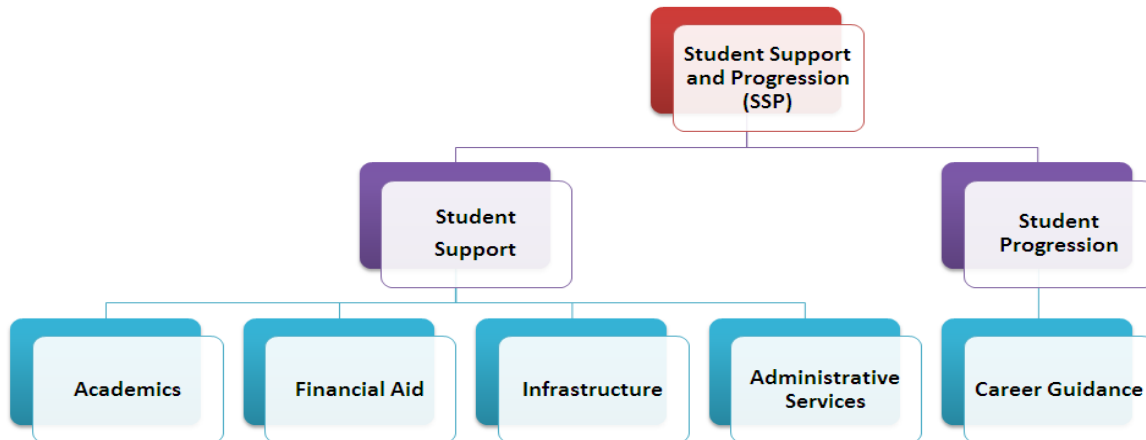
The format of SSP (Student Support and progression) programs at most colleges encourage students to get involved and integrated into campus life. The program provides students with a variety of educational services and places an emphasis on academic success. All services are designed to give students the academic skills and confidence that are necessary for success in college. The program is committed to helping students learn subject matter through activities such as supplemental instruction, course instruction, computer-assisted instructional laboratories, study groups, and tutoring. In simple words, it can be said that student support and progression is the wide range of activities taken up by HEIs to fulfill the needs of the students in various fields like academics, infrastructure, career guidance, social activities etc.

The student services concept is used to describe the divisions or departments which provide services and student support in higher education. Its purpose is to ensure the students growth and development during the academic experience. (NASPA, 2102).

Amid increasing diversity of students admitted to college, there has evolved additional support services that have contributed to the academic and personal development of students, including academic skills development programs and specific support to students who have difficulty learning or adapting to university life. Such services contribute to the quality of the academic experience and help students to achieve learning potential.

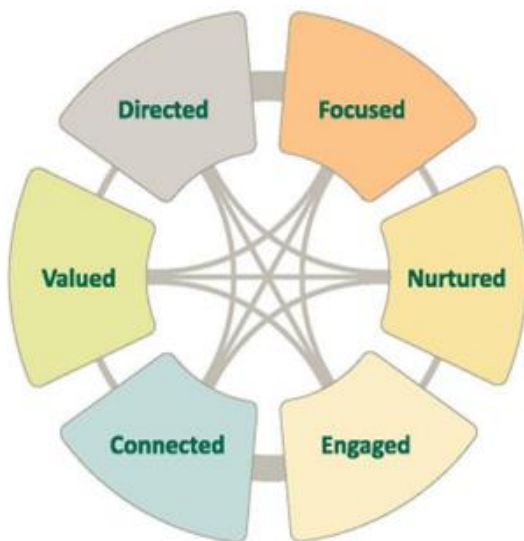
In India, NAAC being the apex body for the accreditation process, has laid down various parameters and requisites to be adopted and implemented by the institutes across the country. This helps them to create a base for getting oneself accredited as well as provide the required services to the students.

Categories of Student Support and Progression (SSP):



Parameters/ Features of Best Practices:

1. Best practices must be amenable to documentation and have the potential for replication;
2. They should be transparent, accountable, affordable and accessible to all students.
3. Best practices should result in change for the better and help students to realize their full potential during and after their studies.
4. They should lead to optimum performance of students in all activities – academic, personal, interpersonal and co-curricular.
5. They should also contribute to learning outside the classroom and should not take for granted learning challenges and systems.



Significance of Student Support and Progression

- Directed: students have a goal and know how to achieve it
- Focused: students stay on track—keeping their eyes on the prize
- Nurtured: students feel somebody wants and helps them to succeed
- Engaged: students actively participate in class and extracurriculars
- Connected: students feel like they are part of the college community
- Valued: students’ skills, talents, abilities and experiences are recognized; they have opportunities to contribute on campus and feel their contributions are appreciated

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ukpo (2006) believed that student support services focus on providing learners with the assistance they need to achieve their desired outcomes in a distance education environment.

According to Rumble (2000), distance educators are now conscious of the importance of spending money and time on student support services, trying to go to avoid through what happened in the 1960s (correspondence distance education era) once again.

Choudhry, Gujjar, and Hafez (2008) observed that student support services are the provision of assistance to meet students' needs. It provides advice on study skills, career choice, accommodation, and Part time employment, personal and interpersonal development, medical matters, scholarship, and financial difficulties among other things. The services exist to address needs or problems which students may have in order to allow them to concentrate more on their studies.

(Tinto, 1993) has produced an integrative theory and models of student departure. His model has six progressive phases: student pre-entry attributes; early goals/commitments to study; institutional experiences; integration into the institution; goals/commitments to the institution; ending in a departure decision, among which institutional experiences and integration are defined in the domain of student support.

According to Bridges (2008) student support services are still the neglected areas in higher education system and come to focus only when unrest prevails in the students. Dhanappa (2014) pointed out that lack of awareness of their rights and responsibilities of the present day, learners are hampering the quality of education.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data which is collected from various websites, online journals, news articles and research papers of various authors.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the concept of student support and progression.
2. To study the framework prescribed by the NAAC to be adopted by institutions.
3. To provide the different best practices that can be adapted by education institutes.

IV. DISCUSSION

Student Support and Progression (SSP):

Student support and progression is one of the most focused parameters in the qualitative assessment of education being imparted in various academic institutions. Student support can be understood as the wide range of various activities taken up by the institutes that help in the progression of students in *their studies, acquisition of skills for employability, inculcation of values and overall development of personality*.

Student support services (SSS) are a cluster of facilities and activities that are provided to make the learning process easier and more interesting for the learner. They serve as the interface between the institution and the learner. The quality of higher education depends directly on the student support services provided in various modes of higher education. If universities and colleges of higher education are deficient in providing support to their students, it does not serve the purpose of education, but only distribution of degrees. The range and the quality of student support services differ from institution to institution.

It has been established that the range and quality of student support services have a direct bearing on student progression – *successful completion of the programme, reduced rates of failures and dropouts, performance in co-curricular, extra-curricular and extension activities*.

The Student Support Services program recognizes that each student attempts college with different learning needs and experiences. Regardless of the program participants' academic needs, one key to their success is involvement in collegial activities whether academic or non-academic.

Students who are actively involved in campus life, particularly focusing on their academics, through academic support programming, personal peer groups, study partners, consistent communication with faculty, and participation in other scholarly organizations, better position themselves for superior achievement and skill development.

Major factors that contribute to the development of student support services and to the sustenance of their quality.

1. efficient library services;
2. arrangements to spot and nurture talent;
3. mentoring for academic development;
4. placement services
5. counseling services.
6. Administrative guidance and support
7. Advanced IT facilities

Best practices in SSP:

Any best practices in student support and progression should contribute to enhance the quality of student support, help the student to successfully navigate the curriculum, demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and skills resulting in progress and successful completion of study.

A best practice shall also equip the student with soft skills to give a competitive edge in the employment market or in further higher studies and in overall personality development. The study and training shall make provision for participation in off-campus activities to make a student more tolerant to accommodate attributes of a pluralistic society with moral values to make him /her good member of the society.

Criterion of Students Support Services (SSP)



1. **Information services:** Student information system containing information about programmes offered, availability of choices, minimum entry requirements, admission policy, academic calendar, fee structure, refund policies, examination

system, promotion and detention rules and avenues for financial support should be provided with utmost transparency. The language should be simple, clear and understandable. A section on frequently asked questions (FAQs) and answers to FAQs would help a student clarify his or her doubts without contacting the institution.

2. **Registration and student records services:** The administrative staff must be trained to be supportive of student needs and exhibit patience to deal with student queries. Maintenance of student records, constant updating of student files, and quick retrieval of information call for technology mediation in the process.
 - a. Regular meetings between the alumni (office bearers) and the college Management by Career Guidance Cell. Some alumni members (retired & senior bureaucrats) form part of the team that helps to prepare students for entry into various fields.
 - b. The College International Student Cell can be established to promote a conducive environment for the international students on the campus. The inclusive policies of the college ensure that the cell offers special support services to these students so that they are acclimatized into a culture not their own.

3. **Academic support services:** It can be done by catering to individual differences, slow learners and advanced learners and providing tutorial and remedial support in difficult areas of learning. Constant monitoring of progress and record-keeping is essential. An analysis at the end of the year / programme to study the impact of the services and making this an input for improvement. Encouraging students to sharpen their listening and writing skills, improving communication skills and overcoming language barriers, will contribute to make academic support in an institution a best practice to be emulated by others.
 - a. Language Cell can be formed which provides personal guidance/counseling to students on Communication Skills, Interview Skills, Resume Consultancy, Information on Resources for English in Competitive Exams-Books and Websites.
 - b. Peer teaching can also be adopted to help slow learners.
 - c. The college can have a student counseling cell which addresses the dropout students and encourages them to complete the course. The Mentor-ward system can be introduced for preventing dropout rates.

4. **Counselling support services:** Counselling support services enable students to overcome their inhibitions, mindset and societal and linguistic barriers. The advice, help and support given by a trained counsellor can enable a student to make satisfactory progress.

Counselling support has two dimensions – counselling on academic related issues and personal issues.

 - a. Academic related counselling pertains to advising the applicants on choice of programmes and courses, protocols of administrative nature, tasks and deadlines, participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and expected behaviour patterns on the campus.
 - b. Personal counselling by a trained counsellor would help students to familiarize them with social etiquette, peer group interaction, attitudinal changes which can help them to overcome emotional problems besides reducing dropout rates consequent upon nonacademic and non-financial reasons.
 - c. During the counselling session, student-friendly activities such as role- play, singing, playing musical instruments, enacting, puzzle play, word games and quizzes can be organized to promote joy and happiness among students.

5. **Library Services:** Library services are not limited to stocking the library with textbooks and reference books but to ensure their accessibility to all students. Materials and facilities, information services, reading room facilities and access to internet and reprographic facilities would contribute to make this a criterion for best practices.
 - a. Book Bank facility can be provided for students and can receive an entire set of text books free for one year against a nominal refundable deposit.

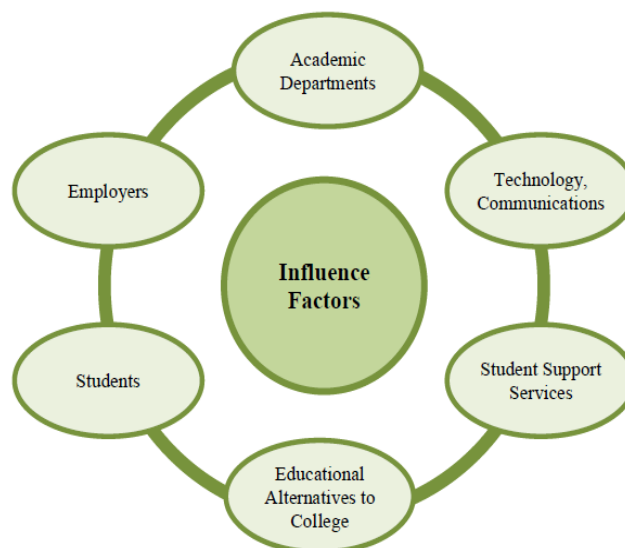
6. **Value added services:** Value addition services refer to the facilities which are not included in the syllabus and curriculum but would help the student to face the competitive employment market after successful completion of study. Communication skills, **vocational** skills, computer skills supplementary to the curriculum would enhance the competencies of students and develop their personality. The quality of value added services and their easy accessibility to all students would be a criterion for best practices.
 - a. Self-financing short-term certificate courses like Affordable Training for Proficiency (ATP) can be run and the

fee income from the courses is utilized for the beautification of the college campus, and for social and extension activities.

- b. Customized Bridge courses can be run.
 - c. Students can be encouraged to write articles for the annual college magazine. Annual publication provides opportunity to the students to express their creativity and ideas. Language departments prepare and exhibit wall papers which boost literary talents of the students.
 - d. The Research Committee can be set up to guide to students to present papers in National Seminars / Conferences
7. **Institutional Networking Services:** Networking in all fields of human activity has become inevitable for the survival of any institution. No institution can provide all facilities and services of the best quality to all students. Linkages with industry, national and international institutions for exchange programmes, would provide students with experiences in working together with students from different backgrounds and cultures, test their theoretical knowledge in the field by working with people outside their communities and would be a criterion for Best Practice.
- a. The practice promotes optimal sharing of the infrastructure facilities by co-ordinating, streamlining and meticulously scheduling their activities. All departments of all the institutions can be entitled to use common facilities such as the auditorium, conference halls, health services and guesthouses. The sense that one does not have to own things under the same roof in order to share them prevails.
 - b. Celebration of International Days with association of international bodies can be organised.
8. **Career guidance and placement services:** Career guidance and placement services refer to provision of linkages to the campus life of students with the realities to be faced by them when they seek employment or opt for further higher studies. Specific information on competitive examinations, choices available in careers, A benchmark of best practice is the establishment of a career guidance and placement services department.
- a. Seminars should be organized to help them to prepare for CAT/ CET, NET, SET, MBA exams etc.
 - b. Personnel from banks, financial institutions and other bodies can be invited to give talks.
 - c. Exhibition-cum-Sale and Setting up stalls for students to sell household items which boost their interest in entrepreneurship and give them direction to begin a small business like selling hand-made paper quilling, jewellery, envelopes, chocolates, diya, candles, food items, cosmetic accessories etc.
 - d. Teachers counsel the students on the usefulness and scope of post graduate courses which motivates them for higher learning. They also help students to prepare for professional examinations like CA and CS and for getting the job suitable to their caliber by acting as facilitators between students and potential employers.
9. **Feedback services:** Feedback services contribute to self-regulation and mid-course correction in modifying, altering and bettering existing support services. The analysis of feedback studies helps to reduce the entropy in the system. The student feedback on teaching in the classrooms and on the quality of teachers, support services and empathy of the persons who matter to student needs, is an indicator of the performance of the institution at micro and macro levels. Not only collecting the feedback from students, parents and public at large on the performance of the institutions but an unbiased, systematic and scientific analysis of the collected data to be used as an important input for future guidance makes this service a best practice.
- a. The Principal, the Vice-principal and the Life-member of the Board can take the decisions on the basis of the feedback report, which is analysed, and the outcome is classified into six categories based on the six NAAC parameters, thus involving the Management in the action.
10. **Student Welfare Services:** Student welfare is a support service which encompasses a variety of services. With the increasing cost of education and entry of students from socially, economically and geographically challenged sections into institutions of higher education, it has become imperative that a best practice would be to ensure that no student would discontinue studies because of non-affordability and financial constraints. Though several scholarships are available to students from socially challenged sections, the **financial support** may not match their needs.
- a. Students not covered by statutory provisions for support find it most difficult to continue their studies because of financial difficulties. In spite of 'earn while learn schemes', 'poor student aid fund', loans from banks, and scholarships instituted by philanthropists and alumni associations, there are still a large number of students who find it difficult to continue their studies because of financial constraints.
 - i. Teachers need to identify needy, very poor students or deserving students and refer them to the

- Students Welfare Centre. Students also can apply directly. Once their eligibility and requirements are scrutinized by the office, freeships/scholarships/interest free loans on a flexible repayment basis can be given to students. Some of the students can be given exemption or concession in fees and/or facility of paying fees in installments. The amount is released at the time of admission and examination so that hardship of the students is minimized. Other than this, faculty members, individual donors and NGOs can provide financial assistance to many students.
- ii. Fee waiver/concession/installment facility/Book bank facility can be given to needy students by the college.
 - iii. Students getting 75% and above in their Board Exams can be offered free education. There can be a provision to pay only university charges. In case of poor meritorious students, even university charges can be refunded in the form of scholarships.
- b. In addition, provision for **medical** and health services, hostel facilities, mechanism to redress grievances and a mechanism to contribute to student welfare would qualify as a criterion for best practice
 - i. The students can be covered under the Group Insurance
 - ii. “Health Week”, “Medical Camp” in association with our NSS Unit, wherein lectures on different health issues and medical checkups can be organised.
 - iii. The institution can provide financial assistance to the students. Freeships can be provided for meritorious students in the form of free boarding and lodging, concession in transport etc.
 - c. Physically challenged students can be encouraged to participate in all the activities of the college promoting inclusive education. Mobility devices like Wheel-chairs and ramp can be built for better mobility and use of lift is permitted. Arrangements of the classrooms during examinations should be made to ensure easy accessibility
 - d. Institutions should appoint special coaches for training students in sports.
 - e. College can provide facilities like providing refreshments/wholesome meals and nutritious beverages during the days of competitions, sports activities, medical assistance, choreographers for theatre performances, adornments (costumes, make-up etc.) to the participating students.
 - f. Facilities such as Free Meals Scheme, book bank and fee waiver for needy students can be provided by the Welfare Committee. Needy learners can also be given summer jobs.
 - g. Prevention of Sexual Harassment Cell can be installed to look into the complaints from students and staff members of the college.
 - h. Anti-Ragging Committee of the college can be set up as per the UGC guidelines and take prompt action in this matter and in case of misunderstanding between classmates, the issue can be amicably resolved.
 - i. Environment Club can be created with an objective to promote environment-friendly approaches and to pursue the practice of Reduce - Reuse - Recycle.

Figure 1. Factors that influence student support services and readiness to transition to roles following graduation.



V. CONCLUSIONS

- While student support is mostly provided by state-of-the-art infrastructure and arrangements made to provide material support to the needy, student progression itself cannot be provided by them, if they are left unexploited. Organized and systematic exploitation of the services can be provided with imaginative and efficient monitoring to generate student progression from student support.
- What is immediately necessary is to identify student needs, analyze their complexity, devise appropriate strategies to meet them differentially, if necessary, and circumvent any impediments, social, economic, methodological, institutional or administrative.
- From the study it can be observed that there are various services and activities that can be taken up by the institutes to develop SSP. It can be further enhanced by making an optimal use of infrastructure and other resources.
- Hence, it can be concluded that the test of student progression is, therefore, not how well the support services are optimally accepted, but it lies in the quality of performance which can pass muster in the testing fields of employment, public performance, leadership and value-moulded character. Of these the forgoing framework is an outline.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

To further enhance the scope of student support and progression, a few additions can be implemented by the institutes like:

- Open books exams can be taken up to widen the scope of reading and accessing new books and e sources of information.
- Personal Mentors can be allotted to students under the Mentoring Programme to help the students to discuss their personal, academic and other issues and find solutions to them.
- Certification Courses in varied subjects and be introduced to enhance additional knowledge of a particular subject.
- Disability services like ramps, walkers, wheelchairs etc can be provided to the needy students free of cost to encompass them into the general student group.
- Activities like Mind Mapping, personal counselling and career guidance can be taken up on an extended level to enhance the scope of already existing student progression services.
- The already established Placement Cell can be collaborated with the Alumni Association to bring new avenues for entrepreneurship and job finding for the existing and pass out students.
- The concept of Affordable Learning, by way of flexible payment norms, institutional scholarships and freships and donation funds can be taken up by the colleges to reach the socially and financially vulnerable sections of the society and motivate them for higher education.

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