

ONE UNIVERSITY: AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION MODEL TO ENHANCE ONLINE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

As higher education institutions see the increased enrollment of online students, the services they provide must adapt to meet their needs. This chapter presents an in-depth case study of the steps that one private American university took, following Kezar's model (2005), to improve online student engagement. The first phase involved buy-in from leadership and creating a valid justification for the collaboration efforts. The second phase involved taking the first steps to create a culture of collaboration across the institution. The third phase involved the development of programs that continued collaboration efforts through various campuses and departments to create tangible products promoting student success. The institution focused more on the process of collaboration than the results in an effort to create a foundation that could outlast staff changes and restructuring of departments. Early results indicate a potential for other universities to examine their processes used for collaboration between colleges and departments.

Keywords: Kezar; case study; collaboration; communication; process; online students; online learning; commitment; engagement; private university.

Online university programs are on the rise, with a third of all students taking at least one online course, and one in six students enrolled exclusively in online programs (Clinefelter, Aslanian, & Magda, 2019). Despite this, engaging these students, both inside and outside the classroom, becomes more challenging than traditional students due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. Higher education institutions must adapt to meet the needs of this increasing population. This chapter provides an overview and case study analysis of an American private university's three-phase collaboration initiative to serve its online student population. This chapter begins with an overview of data on online students, including some relevant statistics to provide context for this chapter. Then, a brief overview is provided of the university and its own online student population. Next, the theoretical framework for the case study will be introduced, including its application to three university initiatives aimed at increasing online student engagement. This chapter will end with a discussion of the successes and challenges of these initiatives.

ONLINE STUDENT CHALLENGES

As of 2016, 31% of all students in the United States were enrolled in at least one online course (Clinefelter et al., 2019). Of those students, 16% took multiple online courses and 14% were fully enrolled online (Clinefelter et al., 2019). The number of fully online students increased by 13% between 2012 and 2017 (Newton, 2019). The demographics of these students are different from those of traditional college students. More than half (51%) of undergraduate students and 70% of graduate students are employed full-time while taking college classes (Paterson, 2019). Despite a growing interest in online learning, one may be surprised to learn that the students enrolling in an online program still selected a college within 50 miles from home (Clinefelter et al., 2019).

A quick analysis of these statistics reveals a few things. The nature of online instruction provides a flexibility that is increasingly popular for students with full-time jobs and otherwise limited time. The attractiveness of online education comes from the ability to study at one's own time, something that a traditional classroom setting does not allow. Despite this, students still choose to enroll in online programs at institutions that are relatively close to their home. Local colleges typically have more visibility with local employers, which online students often see as a benefit of enrolling in a nearby college (Clinefelter et al., 2019).

At the time of writing, the author served as the campus director for two campuses within a private university system that consists of more than 130 campuses around the world. Two of the campuses are traditional, residential campuses. The rest are satellite branch campuses that serve primarily online students. The university has offered distance education since 1970, ranked as a top five institution in undergraduate online education for the last seven years, according to US News and Report 2020. At the time of this writing, 71% of the students who attend the two campuses are fully online. The rest of the students enroll in either a hybrid course experience that combines some online learning with some in-person

instruction or fully in-person instruction at the satellite locations. The majority of the students, both undergraduate and graduate, hold full-time jobs while attending classes. They either work on their own time from home or they attend evening classes at campus locations. While a few of the students are located in distant parts of the world, the majority live within 50 miles of either of the two campuses. Roughly half of the students at the campuses managed by the author occasionally stop by a local campus for advisement or events. The rest communicate primarily through email or phone call.

The author's experience at this institution involved working with students facing a variety of challenges when enrolling in online education. Older students often struggled to navigate the numerous learning systems used for coursework and advisement. Power outages and interruptions in internet service have caused challenges in taking tests and submitting assignments, resulting in working with students and instructors to make up or retake interrupted tests. The flexibility of asynchronous discussions and assignments required that the students be disciplined and exhibit strong time management skills. This was often difficult for new students who are not accustomed to the online learning format. Despite these challenges, the students continued to persist, with year-over-year growth in the student persistent rate of students at both campuses managed by the author for three consecutive years.

Recently, the institution took steps to improve online student engagement in a systematic and holistic way. To illustrate the development and implementation of this engagement initiative, this chapter will provide a case study analysis of three initiatives implemented by the institution. The theoretical framework used to guide the case study is [Kezar's \(2005\) Collaboration Model](#), which provides the foundation for the three initiatives. The next section will provide a brief overview of the model and its components.

KEZAR'S COLLABORATION MODEL

The core of the engagement strategy used at the institution, and the initiatives that followed, was based on university-wide collaboration. The process began with a change in university leadership. The new, incoming president set the stage for a collaborative strategy that would improve the way the university supported its online students, following the collection of feedback from relevant stakeholders. For this case study, the most appropriate theoretical framework was [Kezar's \(2005\) Collaboration Model](#). Although many other collaboration models exist and could have been used, they focused primarily on corporate organizations. Adrianna Kezar had experience working in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. After noticing a divide between the departments at her institution, she sought models on collaboration to help her understand the relationships between different departments. The lack of models focusing on higher education institutions and its unique characteristics resulted in the development of this new model. The foundations of the collaboration model were developed out of George [Kuh's \(1996\) seamless change model](#). This model focused on intentionally initiating

change at all levels of leadership, and that the success of the change could be evaluated by both leadership's actions and the responses to leadership's actions. Kezar's model and Kuh's model were similar in that they both required a proactive plan to lead change, rather than reacting to unexpected external pressures. However, Kuh focused on changing core values as a way to initiate change. Kezar focused on changing processes and evaluating the change of those processes. Unlike other collaboration models that focus on a specific project or initiative, Kezar's model focuses on the process of collaboration itself, and the variables required to create a culture of collaboration within an organization. It takes Kuh's model of seamless change and applies it more directly to collaboration efforts. This process involves three phases that must occur for interdepartmental collaborations to be successful: building commitment, commitment to collaboration, and sustaining commitment. The following sections will describe each phase and how they applied to the institution's emerging engagement strategy.

Building Commitment

The first stage, building commitment, requires an institution to build a story. The institution first must acknowledge that there needs to be collaboration and be able to explain *why* the need exists. This usually begins with external pressure. In the case of this university, the external pressure came from two sources. The first source came from a changing student demographic. Traditionally, the students were primarily older adults who worked full-time and veterans looking to transition to civilian life. In the last few years, however, there has been increasing interest from recent high school graduates who want to pursue online education full-time. Some of the reasons for this interest include cost, flexibility, and ability to live at home while attending college. As a result, these students (and their parents) have asked for additional programs and resources that students have typically come to expect from residential colleges. University officials quickly realized that they were not doing enough to serve this population. The second external pressure came from other institutions. As the number of online learners increase, more institutions are creating online programs to serve the need. As competition increases, institutions must create programs that differentiate them from the competition. Internal pressures also led to the need for a more collaborative approach. Staff at the satellite campuses often felt disconnected from both the residential campuses and other satellite campuses. At university town hall meetings, the most common feedback from staff at all campuses was a need for increased communication between campuses and departments within each campus.

The need for collaboration often develops when an institution creates or reevaluates its values (Kezar, 2001). In the case of this institution, the new leadership created a five-part strategic plan to improve the university in areas such as student success, alumni engagement, and global presence. The strategic plan came as a result of both the external and internal pressures mentioned above, following formal and informal feedback from relevant stakeholders. As the strategic plan was developed, it became increasingly apparent that the university had to improve its collaborative efforts between the different campuses and the

departments within each. Historically, the university operated in silos with little communication between campuses, resulting in inefficient use of resources and duplication of efforts.

Kezar (2005) suggests that learning and the ability to identify the need for collaboration at all levels are necessary steps in phase one of her collaboration model. As the strategic plan was developed, it was important to be able to communicate the importance of collaboration to all related parties, namely the internal stakeholders of the institution. Institutional leaders emphasized that the upcoming changes were as a response to feedback from students, faculty, and staff. University leadership initiated the learning phase through announcements and town halls explaining the need for the new collaboration initiative.

The last variable associated with building commitment is the development of campus networks. This variable is prominent in all three phases, as it is arguably the most important variable and should continue to be developed throughout the process. This involves the creation of cross-departmental relationships. The key to success in these relationships is that they should not be tied to a particular program or initiative. At this phase, the building of relationships should be organic and not solely done for a specific purpose. During the phases, it was important for campus networks to be established within all these divisions to improve collaboration.

Commitment to Collaboration

Once the foundation has been set for collaboration, the institution must secure its commitment to collaboration. To achieve this, the institutional leaders must lead by example. They must demonstrate a visible sense of commitment to the strategy to instill a sense of confidence within the institutional community. In the first phase, leadership is tasked with communicating the need for collaboration. In the second phase, leadership must take action to lead the change. Failure to do this will cause any collaboration efforts to stall.

Another important aspect of the second phase is defining a clear mission. The values created in the first phase must be demonstrated through a clear mission statement and the steps necessary to act on that mission. This was demonstrated at the institution through the creation and publication of the five-part strategic plan that would be enacted over the next several years.

Last, university departments at all levels must continue to strengthen campus networks. The focus should not be on any particular program or initiative but to eliminate the communication barriers that have previously existed in order to facilitate interaction with different departments.

Sustaining Commitment

In the third and final phase, sustaining commitment, the institution has the responsibility to keep the fire lit. Now that some initiatives have been developed, the structure must be put into place to support the initiatives through completion. This requires institutional leaders to provide the resources necessary to support

collaborative efforts. This can include reorganization of departments, hiring of new staff, and providing funding for critical programs. At the institution, new committees were created to provide the foundation for collaboration. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Another aspect important to this phase is having a reward system. There should be incentives to encourage and celebrate successful collaboration. These rewards could range from monetary incentives to positive words of affirmation in the day-to-day management of departments. This variable is crucial to the continued sustainment of collaboration beyond any individual project or initiative.

Finally, campus networks must continue to be strengthened. Departments must be given opportunities to interact with each other in both formal and informal settings, outside of specific projects or programs. Combined with rewards and structural support, this would ensure that a culture of collaboration is maintained through changes in employees and leadership.

ANALYSIS OF INITIATIVES USING COLLABORATION MODEL

Using Kezar's Collaboration Model as the theoretical foundation, the author conducted a case study analysis on three initiatives led by the university in support of increased collaboration.

It is important to note that the focus of Kezar's Collaboration Model is not primarily on the results of any particular program or initiative. The focus is on the structural process of collaboration itself. It is a study of how the collaboration was formed and maintained throughout the process. In this sense, it is possible to have a program that failed in its primary educational purpose but could still be successful in the collaboration that took place to create it. This section analyzes several institutional initiatives under the lens of Kezar's Collaboration Model. The initiatives will be described based on which phase of the model they took place.

Building Commitment: Unified University Vision

The university is comprised of over 130 campuses around the world. The university system is separated into three main divisions, the two residential campuses and the worldwide campus. The worldwide campus is then further divided into three subdivisions: US satellite campuses, international satellite campuses, and the online campus. Although the campuses may differ slightly in their program offerings, they generally fall under the same overarching university umbrella. Despite this, the campuses have traditionally operated in silos. Everything from course scheduling to marketing to enrollment management was separated by campus. This would sometimes result in duplication of efforts and staffing where recruiters from different campuses would end up at the same college fair, unaware of the other's presence. In addition, the diplomas for the two residential campuses looked different from the satellite campuses, further amplifying the divide. The nature of this disconnect, compounded by the geographical distance between campuses, made it difficult for collaboration to take place.

To begin the implementation of the new collaboration process, university leadership embraced a new, “one university” philosophy. This basic principle of the vision was that all campuses were part of one university. Every campus, whether residential or online, whether US-based or international, was an extension of one overall university vision. This meant that all the campuses would start marketing themselves in one unified way. The initiative was inspired by faculty, staff, and student feedback that was provided during institution-wide town hall meetings and targeted focus groups. A consistent theme among the comments was the conflict of one campus being “lesser than” other campuses. These comments were most visible on institution-affiliated social media pages, where students joked about the perceived elitism in some of the campuses over others. The details of the initiative were first introduced at a university-wide virtual town hall meeting and then further elaborated over the next few months through announcements. The largest initiative related to this strategy was the development of a new strategic plan developed over 10 months through a collaboration of students, faculty, staff, and community stakeholders. The plan would be executed over a six-year period.

The first concrete step taken by institution leaders was the unification of the institutional diploma and transcripts among all campuses. This change, which had been requested by staff through informal channels for several years, was made relatively quickly in an effort for leadership to show they were serious about this new vision. This gesture, though largely symbolic in nature, was necessary to show the institution’s initial commitment to creating a collaborative atmosphere. This would allow an online military student attending the university overseas to receive the same diploma as a traditional student attending one of the residential campuses.

As part of the first phase of [Kezar’s \(2005\)](#) model, the institution needs to build the story of collaboration and commitment to collaboration. This story must have the *why*, *what*, and *how* of collaboration. Why is collaboration necessary? What would this collaboration look like? How will the institution get there? Some important elements were present that allowed this phase to occur. The external pressures of an increasingly diverse student population and more competition from other online programs were present. University leadership understood the importance of unifying the institution and created a set of values that highlighted this unification strategy through a strategic plan. The need and plan for collaboration was communicated to employees at all levels of the institution, getting input from all relevant parties. Departments were encouraged to increase their communication. The initial first step of unifying the institutional diploma across all the campuses was meant to illustrate the urgency of the new vision and a way to get the campuses on board with the idea of a unified campus. The idea was planted that the institution was about to embark on a journey of change and everyone had their part to play.

Implementing Commitment: Standardizing Campus Processes

Once the foundation was set during the building phase, the institution had to create a sense of urgency and communicate this urgency to all employees. To do this, a number of university summits were created that would take place at

different university campuses, where key representatives from other campuses would be invited. The goal of these summits was to learn about the unique attributes of each campus, the programs offered, and the personnel who worked there. The summits included a variety of workshops, presentations, and team-building activities over the course of a few days. Each summit was led and organized by faculty and staff from that respective campus, from all levels of the institutional hierarchy.

The purpose of these campus summits was to provide employees an opportunity to get to know employees who lived and worked hundreds, or even thousands, of miles away. The summits, attended by the author, consisted of a mixture of formal and informal programming over the course of three to five days. The formal programming involved presentations by faculty and staff about each campus' academic programs, processes and procedures, statistics about student population, and local features and attractions. Informal programming involved opportunities for team bonding such as hiking trips, dinners, picnics, canoe rides, and shopping. These efforts served to break barriers of communication by allowing staff and faculty to interact and become comfortable with the idea of collaboration through different settings. After the summits, communication between staff at different campuses improved. In the author's campuses, there was a notable increase in calls to and from other campuses to share best practices, to ask questions about unclear processes, and to assist students moving from one campus to another. The summits, and resulting communication afterward, illustrate [Kezar's \(2005\)](#) second phase of implementing commitment by removing barriers to collaboration and strengthening campus networks.

In addition to being knowledgeable about all the university campuses, another important initiative was to maintain a consistent message coming out of the university. Traditionally, online students would be contacted for specific reasons, such as registration, balance owed, or due to risk factors such as poor grades. However, this left a segment of the student population generally unattended. Students who registered themselves for class, paid for their classes on time, and made decent grades had little reason to be contacted. As a result, the student would likely not be noticed until something adverse happened, such as a job loss resulting in lack of payment or health issue resulting in withdrawing from a class. An important goal for increasing online student engagement was to create a systematic process for communicating with students.

This resulted in the creation of a standardized communication plan that would be shared across the campuses. The communication plan was a master shared document that would contain timelines for when to contact students and for what reason. It was created using Microsoft Excel and various macros that linked up with university databases. The timeline included typical traditional student communication touch points regarding financial aid, registration, and tuition payment reminders. However, the communication plan also allowed for additional methods of communication. This created a timeline for reaching out to students who had a birthday, students who had not taken a class for a while, and students who had made the Dean's List. Every campus would have the same timeline and would contact the students the same way. The communication plan was used

to download queries containing lists of students with anticipated contact times. It also included email templates and sample scripts that could be personalized to the specific campus. More importantly, every campus had access to every other campus' notes within that communication plan through the shared document in an online server. This made it easier to assist a student regardless of which campus the student called. For example, if an online student who lived in California moved to Florida, the California advisor would be able to switch the student over to the Florida advisor through a seamless transition. The Florida advisor would instantly be able to see all the communication with the student up until that point and be able to personalize their communication with the student using that information.

The communication plan, created jointly by three campus staff members at three separate satellite campuses, was implemented in phases, with a few pilot campuses trained to use it first. The plan was then broadened to include more campuses until every campus had the training and access to interact with students in this formalized manner. The plan was embraced by leadership as a continuation of implementing commitment to collaboration. However, not everyone embraced the communication plan during implementation. While some directors and advisors appreciated the added structure and streamlining of communication processes, others saw the plan as a way to limit their campus autonomy. At a few task force meetings, staff would share their concerns about the rigidity of the plan and their struggle to keep to the timelines that the plan recommended. Over time, as more campuses became accustomed to the plan, some of those who questioned the communication plan saw its value and supported the endeavor. This was evident throughout the continued town halls and task force meetings where staff were able to share their thoughts on an ongoing basis.

The communication plan was a result of the foundation work that was done to create better communication between campus staff. The summits served as a valuable first step to break down barriers of communication between campuses, who often operated in silos and had processes that vastly differed from one another. As communication strengthened between directors, admissions counselors, advisors, and administrative assistants, staff were able to see an opportunity for working together in a more systematic way. A key distinction in Kezar's model versus other collaboration models is the process used to improve collaboration. The communication plan, as helpful as it was, is merely a product, not a process. Kezar's model acknowledges the focus on the communication plan's creation. The plan was created through an initiative that was started by staff members at three satellite campuses and worked its way up to campus leadership, rather than a top-down approach where leadership brought the plan to the satellite campuses (at least initially). Phase one of the plan allowed individual campuses the flexibility, freedom, and motivation to find solutions to increase collaboration in phase two.

Sustaining Commitment: Formal Collaborative Programs

The success of the initiatives during the first two phases allowed the institution to move forward with more formalized collaboration programs. These programs

required more time and resources to implement than the previous initiatives. Two programs that were formed during phase three were the ambassador program and the Pathways to Success program. Each program was created to increase collaborations between key departments to improve student engagement across the campuses. The ambassador program was a collaboration between Enrollment Management, Marketing, and Campus Operations to create a stronger system for communicating with university prospects. Under the old system, each campus would initiate its own recruitment strategies, which would sometimes cause confusion as the messaging was different depending on the campus. Campuses would compete with each other for students and for resources. The purpose of the ambassador program was to create a unified message that would go out to prospects and pair the prospect with the correct campus based on their degree interests, financial situation, and learning modality preferences. The students who would benefit more from online education would be referred to the more online-friendly campuses and the students wanting a more hands-on experience would be referred to the residential campuses. Unlike previous recruitment efforts where admissions recruiters would highlight a specific campus they represented, university ambassadors, which consisted of different staff members (not just recruiters), represented all the campuses as one university system. As relationships were formed with prospects and their parents, the ambassador would then suggest a campus that best met the prospect's needs and interests. Another responsibility of university ambassadors involved outreach to the local community and introducing them to the university system. As an ambassador, the author attended various community events to build brand awareness for the university. Trained with the knowledge of the different campuses, the author was able to speak confidently about the various programs and learning experiences available throughout the university system.

The implementation of the ambassador program was only possible through the efforts completed in the first two phases of the collaboration model. Prior to the phases, recruitment would be solely the jobs of the recruiters in the enrollment management division. It was unusual for someone other than a recruiter to be out in the community speaking to prospects and their families. By having support from every level of university leadership, as well as the increased communication between campuses to build trust, it became easier to establish a cross-campus recruitment strategy. It allowed recruiters to trust faculty and advisors to give accurate information about the university at college fairs and community events. It also allowed campus staff to trust that recruiters from other campuses would represent them properly. This trust developed over time but still has a way to go. There have been incidents where different campuses would still compete over which college fairs they would attend, since this new initiative meant that only one campus would attend a particular fair. Having two campuses holding booths from the same university would be redundant and go against the spirit of collaboration. This sometimes caused conflict since individual staff members had a difficult time trusting that a different campus would send students over to them and not keep them for themselves. One strategy for minimizing this conflict was to have one representative from each campus attend the same fair using the same

booth. This would allow further strengthening of campus networks and further building trust as the staff members worked together.

The second program is the Pathways to Success program. This is an initiative aimed at supporting current students. This was a collaboration between Academics, Advising and Operations, Registrar, Scheduling, and Enrollment Management. Its purpose was to create a set of experiences that would help improve student engagement and retention. One of the first initiatives to be implemented from this program was a series of online student success webinars. Academic advisors worked together with faculty to create a list of topics that would be presented to students in an online workshop. These topics included financial literacy, personal branding, APA skills, and math skills. The faculty used the same teleconferencing software that they used in their online classes and students could join from all around the world. The staff at the advising offices marketed the workshops to the students and hosted local viewing parties at select campuses for online students who lived within the area. As the Pathways to Success program continues to be developed, additional collaborative initiatives are being implemented.

The process for developing this program was supported by the previous phases of the model. The author had previously collaborated with faculty at the multiple summits attended earlier in the year. The relationships built with these faculty members made it much easier to collaborate on the Pathways to Success program. Prior to these initiatives, it was rare for campus staff to interact with the faculty. Most faculty teach fully online and do not live near the campuses where they teach. As such, communication with faculty was limited to targeted communication about an at-risk student. The increased communication throughout the three phases allowed for more faculty–staff interaction, which developed into several programs such as the Pathways to Success program.

Both programs described above involved the collaboration between multiple departments and multiple campuses to create tangible products that no individual department or campus could do alone. Phase three of Kezar’s model is typically where many collaborative projects begin. The “product” phase is the most visible of the three phases and often produces the most tangible results, such as the marketing materials developed in the ambassador program or the webinars in the Pathways program. As mentioned in this section, the third phase on its own may not be effective without the foundation laid in the first two phases. Even if the collaboration results in a successful program, there is no guarantee that the next program will also be successful. Department restructuring or personnel changes can disrupt an ongoing collaboration. For example, if two departments collaborate well because two employees from the departments get along, such collaboration could end if one of the employees resigns. The first two phases of collaboration are necessary to create a culture of collaboration that transcends any one individual person, department, or campus. It allows for systemic collaboration that can persist through structural changes, budget cuts, and unexpected external pressures. This was illustrated at the institution as a university ambassador resigned from her position shortly after the designation. Despite this, her replacement was quickly assigned the ambassador status and embraced the collaborative nature with support from colleagues at other campuses. This was

due, in part, to the culture of collaboration that had been created, which allows collaboration efforts to survive personnel changes.

DISCUSSION

The initiatives described above are a result of intentional structural changes that took place at the university at all levels. It started with the need for collaboration, emphasized by external pressures from changing student demographics and internal pressures from personnel wanting better communication between campuses. University leadership took steps to create a story by creating a strategic plan with faculty, staff, student, and community input. This was followed by campus-led summits where representatives from the campuses could learn about the differences and similarities between programs and get to know each other through team-building activities. Leadership further supported collaboration by promoting grassroots efforts and ideas, which resulted in a communication plan developed by staff at three different campuses. Further collaborations between faculty and staff created additional programming opportunities that were previously absent from the institution. University leaders further supported these efforts through incentives such as providing the necessary resources to help these programs take shape.

While it is still too early to quantify or analyze the results of these new processes, Kezar's model does not focus on the results, as other collaboration models often do. The focus is on how well the structural changes were implemented and how they could be improved in the future. As with any large-scale change, conflict was inevitable. Some staff and faculty members were more resistant to the rapid changes, often citing their lack of autonomy as a primary reason for their resistance. One major factor in the implementation of these changes was the open channel of communication available throughout. Regular town hall meetings were open to every staff and faculty member. Task force groups were created by leadership that had representatives from each campus to meet monthly and report on feedback from personnel about changes. In addition, the university president held frequent virtual meetings where anyone could set up an appointment and discuss what was on their mind. These channels of communication helped to bring concerns out into the open and address issues as they were presented. The key to these changes required participation from everyone. It was not simply a top-down decision, although leadership was crucial in assessing the changes and providing much-needed support throughout to increase collaboration opportunities.

Institutional collaboration has allowed the university to better serve its online students in a variety of ways. First, by having more knowledgeable staff, they are better prepared to provide exceptional customer service to students regardless of location. Through the standardized communication plan, students can be confident knowing that staff can assist them no matter where they are in the world. They can call any campus and be able to receive the same level of service they have come to expect. The new interdepartmental programs have allowed

staff and faculty to reach more students than ever. It has allowed an expansion of reach and better use of limited resources to create bigger projects. Most importantly, the institution is developing a culture that can make communication easier within any campus or division within the university. A staff member can call a colleague that is several states away about an issue due to relationships formed with that colleague during a summit. A recruiter can talk about a program offered at the Singapore campus because she learned about it through staff retreats. These changes are constantly being monitored and improved on a continuous basis. Initial response from students is positive. Several students have expressed appreciation that all diplomas have become standardized across campuses, particularly students who attend satellite campuses and felt their degree was somehow of less quality than that of those in the residential campuses. The interdepartmental workshops, delivered fully online, have been well attended by students. Assessments of these programs have resulted in positive feedback from the students who appreciate the diversification of topics presented thanks to the increased collaboration.

CONCLUSION

As higher education institutions see the increased enrollment of online students, the services they provide must adapt to meet their needs. An American private university did this by implementing a three-phase collaboration model to better serve an evolving student population. The first phase involved buy-in from leadership and creating a valid justification for the collaboration efforts. The second phase involved taking the first steps to create a culture of collaboration across the institution. The third phase involved the development of programs that continued collaboration efforts through various campuses and departments to create tangible products promoting student success. It was important to analyze the *process* of collaboration, not just the end result, to make sure that there was a foundation that could outlast staff changes and restructuring of departments. Though still early in the process, initial results of collaboration have been positive. Online students have reacted positively to the changes, and employee morale has also improved thanks to increased channels of communication. Other universities are encouraged to evaluate their own collaboration processes and look for areas of improvement using the three-phase model.

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