Bridge Program- An Effective Tool for Transition of Students from Pre-University to University

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Abstract: In today’s challenging and dynamic environment, Education is playing a key role in the success of student’s life. Research studies showed that pre-universities have a lesser emphasis on life skills like teamwork, time management, continuous learning and independent studying capabilities. The evaluation of students learning is measured by quantum of marks or credits and the outcome based learning is given lesser importance. But these skills seem to be the more essential for success of students in higher education in universities. Bridging the readiness gap of students and creating transition from pre-university to first year university education is challenging as well has an impact on their retention in the course for which they are enrolled. PES University has executed a one month bridge program for the undergraduate management and compute application students as a first milestone of student development programs with key focus on orientation, motivation, critical thinking, self awareness, social awareness, career preparation, social responsibility, interpersonal skills and hands on activities.

Keywords: Bridge program, transition program, pre-university to University

I. INTRODUCTION

The moral purpose of education is to create a difference in the life of students irrespective of background (Fullan, 1993, p.4). Fink (2003, p. 50) pointed an attractive outlook that helping people to learn as how to learn during and after the course is capable of inducing a continuous learning in their life. Danielson (2002, p.13) identified relationship among self confidence and success. He stated that students tend to take additional challenges based on their success in school. Robert and Higgins (1992) survey among first year students of Polytechnics and English universities showed that lack in appropriate study skills occurs as a result of difficulties in adjustment with academic culture. They further stated that pre-universities provides less or inadequate promotion on teamwork, independent studying capacities and time management skills. Many researchers supported that most of these skills are essential for success in university (Robert and Higgins 1992; McInnis and James 1995; Lowe and Cook 2003).

II. NEED FOR TRANSITION PROGRAMS

Students’ initial experience gained in campus environment plays a major role in their transition to university and their first year experience (Tinto 1993). Other than the curriculum and basic elements of instruction, universities initiative towards first year transition is more substantial requirement (McInnis et al., 2000). Students success depends more likely on the quantity and quality of involvement exhibited by them (Upcraft and M. Lee. 1995). Research study by Forest (1985) identified higher graduation rate among institutions which provides advising and orientation programs. Research by Tinto (1993, p. 14); Lang (2007, p. 11) showed that first year experience and transition to university environment plays a larger role in students success. Pascarella & Terenzini, (2005) emphasized on Astin’s (1985) Student Integration model as the quality of involvement and the institutional resources have an impact in determining the nature and extent of growth of an individual. The policy makers of Florida and West Virginia consider that investment in education as inevitable area for promoting economic development and hence they are more interested in bridging the gap between high school and postsecondary studies (DeYoung, 1989). The Pell Institute (2014) identified that bridge programs, study groups and learning communities which eased the new entrant students created high graduation rates. Hence universities and institutions can use bridge program as an effective tool to create transition and also to bridge the college readiness gap of students from their school education. Reducing such readiness gap helps institution in retaining them and also helps students in their success enhancement and task completion rate.

III. BRIDGE PROGRAM AND TRANSITION

The Oxford Dictionary (2010) defines a bridge as “something that is intended to form a connection between two things”. Schlossberg (2008, p.10) defines transition as an event or non-event which alters the relationship, roles and assumptions of an individual. Tinto (1993) highlights that transition programs helps students to cope or overcome difficulties related with changes in their routines.
assumptions, roles and relationship when they move from high school to college. He further stated that such transition is difficult since factors like separation from their family, friends and differences in academic and social demands make individual student cope with the transition differently. Hillman (2005) noticed the importance of orientation as an effective enabler in bringing transition process for first year students. Many researchers defined the filling of college readiness gap of students from high school as Summer Bridge program (Berkeley, 2010), orientation (Hillman, 2005) and transition program (Tinto, 1993).

IV. BRIDGE OR TRANSITION PROGRAMS IN FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES

Residential summer bridge program was conducted for freshman at elite institutions in University of California towards bridging the gap between high school and four-year institutions (Berkeley 2010). Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, (2010) conducts bridge programs during fall or spring semesters. Gardner, (1986) identified higher retention among freshmen who completed orientation courses than those who have not attended and that resulted in establishment of National Resource Center at the University of South Carolina. Pargetter et al. (1988) summarized his research on first year students’ transition experiences from Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America and Asia and identified some of the issues which affect first year students’ successful transition as psychological characteristics, social and institutional factors, demographic characteristics, prior performance and assessment outcomes. His further study among first year students transition of Monash University highlighted the role of institutions in increasing the independent learning ability, self-reliance, self-discipline and motivation.

V. TRANSITION PROGRAM AT PES UNIVERSITY

PES University formerly known as PES Institute of Technology is located at Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of India. PES has got the University status in 2013. This University carries forward the principles and spirit of its founder Chairman Dr. M. R. Doreswamy: innovation, entrepreneurship, outreach and perennial love for quality education. With a mission to provide Smoother transition from pre university to university, critical thinking, self awareness, inter group relations, self motivation, understanding of values and ethics and realistic understanding of the course and university expectations, the bridge or transition program was designed and conducted by PES University for the undergraduate students of Business Management (BBM), Hotel Management (BHEM), and Computer Applications (BCA).

With the approval of Top Management the Core team designed the elements, structure, duration, intensity and scheduling for the entire program. To make an effective implementation and championing the program the core team incorporated the faculty of respective departments into the team and formalized their roles and obligations towards the program. The Core team had series of brainstorming with its members to have shared goals, proper communication and to create a unique transition program which would differ from other Universities and Institutions.

This Bridge program with series of events was designed for five weeks from 23rd June 2014 to 25th July 2014 with a key focus on orientation, self analysis, social analysis, creative thinking, interpersonal skills, motivation and career preparation. In a Week the transition program was scheduled from Monday to Friday within the University premises which gave them an opportunity to visit facilities on campus like class rooms, library, sports amenities, research labs, and recreation facilities etc., to familiarize them with the University whereabouts. Few Fridays were planned as off campus activities such as visit to various places related with their respective domain which created additional enhancement for their transition. Every day the session started at 8:15 am and ended at 3.30 pm. The uniqueness of this program was there was no attendance compulsion and credit for attending this program which seems to be mandatory in many foreign university bridge programs. The quality of content in the entire program created enthusiasm and made students to participate and attend regularly without any conditional element.

VI. COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAM

6.1. Orientation

All first year students possibly experience transitional issues. Majority of students from nontraditional environment might experiences difficulties in a greater extent (Patrick, Furlow & Donovan, 1998). According to Collier & Morgan (2007) awareness about performing the role of university student may be limited based on nontraditional student’s cultural resources and awareness about higher education. To bridge this gap an overview of activities in BBM/BHEM/BCA and introduction to curriculum was made by the respective chair persons. In addition to this students were made to visit the University library which helped them to know the various library resources and gave an outline as how such resources can be used effectively in their under graduation. A session was conducted on guidelines to grooming and body language which might help students in enabling a professional image.

6.2. Ice Breaker

An individual’s cognitive, psychological, affective and behavioral development is influenced by one’s
peer group members (Astin, 1993). Student’s knowledge acquisition, self-esteem, problem solving skills, overall academic development and analytical skills are positively influenced by their interaction with their peer members (Kuh, 1995). When students feel supported by peers their adaptation towards university environment seems to be increasing (Kiesling et al., 2004). Hence an Icebreaker event was designed to create familiarity among their batch mates. In this event students were grouped based on an activity and they made their own team name, logo and tagline. In addition to this each team was given a task to know each other on five parameters which made them understand their own members. The same teams were retained for the entire program for all group activities.

6.3. Self Awareness

McKeachie & Hofer (2002) stated that colleges should provide opportunities for students to know their general characteristics. He further pointed out the importance of self-reflection on self-regulation. Earlier clear and meaningful feedbacks sharpen students Meta cognitive skills (Smittle, 2003). Student’s academic success depends on their self-motivation and self awareness (Giuliano & Sullivan, 2004). As a part of this program series of yoga sessions were conducted to make students’ understand their inner self, physical and mental strength. A session on creativity made students to uncover their creative talents. Self SWOT analysis was conducted in an objective way to make student’s identify their actions that could take them to fulfill their career requirements. Self analysis included assessment of self motivation inventory and anger management inventory of knowing their own self which was addressed with self verification and self enhancement. Handwriting analysis provided students with guidelines about their character, disposition and attitudes from their handwriting. Teams formed during the icebreaking session participated in many Quiz programs which were conducted in areas like marketing, sports, mathematics, current affairs and business in order to know their level of awareness and to encourage students in updating themselves on a regular basis.

6.4. Interpersonal Skills

Students can be made to connect socially and psychologically by co-curricular activities. Such engagement in activities develops interpersonal skills, competencies and self confidence which help them in succeeding in their college (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Carroll (1988) found a positive relationship between persistence and co-curricular activities. Management games were conducted to enhance the student’s interpersonal skills. To develop social skills, games were conducted related with co-ordination and team building. Stress management games were conducted with an objective to develop competencies and self confidence. Treasure Hunt event was conducted on an objective to develop problem solving skills . Various sports event like cricket, football, basketball, carom and chess were conducted which is believed to develop leadership, sportsmanship, group cohesiveness and interpersonal relationship which might influence healthy behavior in their college life.

6.5. Career Preparation

Super, (1990) stated that adolescents key developmental task is career preparation which improves future well being, personal development and social adjustment. Students get indulge in drug abuse, absent themselves for classes and drop out of course when there is insufficient counseling and guidance (Odeke, 1996). Students achievement in academics and increase in study attitudes can be improved by counseling and guidance. Bark, (2003) stated that counseling and guidance by trained and qualified persons can develop an individual in managing his views and decisions. To provide necessary guidance towards career preparation, guest lecturer was organized on communication, career guidance to additional professional courses. A session on counseling helped students in mapping their personality. A guest lecture on cricket to corporate was organized in which companies were compared with the cricket players. Lock & Latham, (1990) pointed that motivation and effort of an individual is influenced by goal setting. A session on goal setting helped students to fix short and long term goals before the commencement of their university program.

6.6. Motivation

Motivating students seems to be the primary problem in today’s education (Howard Hendricks, 1987). When a student lacks motivation he used to de motivate his peer members (Breen and Lindsay; 2002). Skill development can be improved and motivation can be maintained by increasing self efficacy (Schunk, 1991). To motivate meaningful engagement and to increase awareness, pride and participation of the students panel discussions were arranged with Alumni’s which helped first year students to know the expectation of corporate and the ways to bridge those gaps in university education. To discover and recognize the exceptionally talented students, talent hunt was conducted in which students participated enthusiastically and explored their potential. Meyrs, (2004) highlighted that images or visual encoding is the core area of memory aids. Motivational movies like Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, Chake de India, Babe and In Pursuit of Happiness helped students in learning the various leadership styles, self motivation, perception, goal setting, attitude and many more management concepts which are essentially required for a management graduate.

6.7. Field Visits
Research work by Guisasola, Morentin & Zuza, (2005) suggested that educational programs can be planned by considering the entertainment factor along with the needs and interests of students’. Field visits for students’ have greater effects on attitude towards education (Wendlng & Wuesch, 1985: Hannon & Randolph, 1999) and learning (MacKenzie & White, 1982; Farmer et al., 2007). Students enjoy learning in such less formal setting (Braud & Reiss, 2006). As a part of bridge program undergraduate students from Business Management were taken to a largest sports equipment and Sportswear retail outlet Decathlon in Bannergatta road, Bangalore. The main objective of the trip was to provide a firsthand experience to students on how an enterprise functions. They were encouraged to interact with employees with a standard check list in various departments like finance, Marketing, Human Resource and Systems. The Hotel Management students had their field visits to Ginger Hotel, Gundappa’s Hotel, Vidyarthi Bhavan, Hotel Mysore Mylari, Hallimane- Rural Restaurant and The Elite Business Hotel in Bangalore city to get an exposure on production, food varieties, service process, quality management and customer relationship management.

6.8. Entrepreneurship Training

6.8.1. Hard Selling

For the success of first year students, University or Institutions need to help them in achieving their personal and educational goals (Upcraft and Gardner, 1989). By providing autonomy, choice and accountability, students can be motivated and can be enhanced with sense of control (McKeachie & Hofer, 2002). There should be high expectation on students and must think on ways of helping students for their success (Merritt et al., 2003). To create intrinsic motivation where students can use their own inner drive and get satisfaction for the job done well, a one day hard selling event named De-Venta was organized. The entire event was funded, designed and marketed by the undergraduate students of this bridge program with limited supervision by the faculty. Voluntary leaders formed the core team and took initiative for cooking, fund management and marketing the event inside the campus. Students set up their own stalls with creative products, tasty delightful dishes, games and art accessories. This event gave them a live exposure on exhibiting their talent, management skills, pricing strategies, promoting a product, knowing the behavior of customer, fund management and event management. Since such an event was organized by the students who were newly enrolled in university program, lot of expectation went around inside the campus and the event ended with a grand success.

6.8.2. Cookery

Students’ actual successes in challenging academic tasks have an impact on their insight on competence developed (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). McKeachie & Hofer, (2002) pointed that students learn when they are made to use their skills, strategies and knowledge. Intellectual power is obtained by making learners to make new connections (Fink, 2003). To make hotel management students apply their skills and knowledge before the commencement of course, two sessions were conducted via basket cookery and cooking without fire events respectively, in which students made their own dishes without the interruption or guidance from faculty. Their creative dishes were evaluated on certain parameters and appreciation rewards were given for motivating them.

6.8.3. Documentary

Learning of students will be high when they complete a task and were asked to write about it Merritt et al., (2003). As a proof of learning students were asked to create a documentary video on their field visits which was presented on the valedictory. Such documentary preparation involved students in showing their teamwork, coordination, innovative thinking. With the standard check list about various departments, interview with customers and salespersons, a presentation on their visit to retail outlet-Decathlon was made by one representative of business management. Student representative of Hotel Management made a documentary on Gundappa’s hotel which was initially known as Ram Vilas sweets.

6.8.4. Student Social Responsibility

Literature highlights that apart from building friendship students should be involved in social activities in aiding transition (Hillman, 2005). A visit was organized to The Art of Living International Center at Bangalore to help students understand their inner self. Apart from fun and joy they had interactive learning experience in ayurveda hospital, served food at the ashram and helped aged persons. A final visit to Sumanahalli-Village of people of good heart, in Bangalore where the underprivileged group of people who are affected by HIV, leprosy, orphans, children with disabilities, children in conflict with law and street boys were leading a dignified life. Many students interacted and played with the children at the school and this trip changed their outlook to life, and created an urge to help society.

6.8.5. Memory Training

Rebok et al., (2007) and Lustig et al., (2009) identified that memory can be increased by training the strategy. Morrison & Chein (2010) found that cognitive skills and working memory capacity can be increased through cognitive training by focusing
on speed, attention and dual tasking. As a part of the bridge program a session on memory training was conducted in which four students from second year business management were selected and a demonstration was conducted by memorizing a list of twenty objects of audience preference. They recalled all twenty objects in the same order along with the listed numbers from one to twenty and vice versa. After the demonstration, students from first year program were selected based on their interest, trained by the second year students and they made their demo on the valedictory function which became a proof of learning and hands on experience.

6.8.6 Android Application:

Catering to the current information and data requirements of various clients and customers has become an essential element of various business organizations for which the IT industries have been working for many decades. Considering this as a challenging opportunity the undergraduate students of computer application were given an assignment of developing an application to cater to the requirements of the hotel industry which was successfully tested and developed with the guidance of the facilitators. This application was developed with an objective of simplifying the process in a restaurant like choosing the menu, placing the order, order tracking and billing without involving much of manual process which is considered to be time consuming and issues related quality service delivery.

VII. CONCLUSION

Persistence and graduation of students depends on their involvement in social relation and academics (Seidman, 2005) which can be enhanced by transition programs (Wolf-Wendel et al., 1999). This article is an attempt to explain the need and importance of transition programs in Universities for filling the readiness gap between Pre-University and University program. Students’ feedback which was taken at the end of each session highlighted the quality of each session which helped each and every student realize and learn about their dreams, passion, capability, desire, hunger to succeed, knowledge, shortfalls, enemies, companions, love, friendship, teachers etc. All these life lessons are impressed within them. The main catch of the entire bridge program was ‘do what you love and love what you do’. Everyday debriefing among core team and faculty was recorded and more emphasis was laid on quality improvement to make learning process more effective which resulted in positive and productive feedback by the facilitating team. The faculty recommended the management and the core team to consider this bridge program as a part of University curriculum as the initiative had a constructive impact on the student wellbeing. Expectation of academic environment can be socialized by early bridge or transition programs. Universities or institutions can conduct such programs by understanding the environment of higher education and recognizing the skills needed for success which not only increase their involvement, self awareness, interpersonal skills, relationship with peer students, and positive initial experience in campus environment but also increase their success in education and career which would drive them for continuous learning in the real world.

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