Chapter 20

Embedded Services: Going Beyond the Field of Dreams Model for Online Programs

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores the model of embedded librarian and writing center services that the authors have been piloting as part of a proposed online master’s program in Educational Technology. The authors reviewed the literature related to services embedded in online programs and describe the planning and execution of their pilot. The chapter outlines the various forms an embedded model can take, the resources necessary to support embedded services, and the need to maintain faculty autonomy over the course. Finally, the authors provide a preliminary list of best practices for faculty and support service staff interested in embedding services into an online course.

INTRODUCTION
“Build it and they will come.” This Field of Dreams model of student services has served institutions well over the years. Large libraries house books and study carrels. Writing centers have writing tutors ready and waiting. Of course, in person, not everyone wants to walk to the library or knows about the writing tutors or wants to admit they need the help. As our students move online, this problem only gets worse. Many libraries and writing centers have done a great job creating electronic collections and providing online services. These can be quite effective, but they rely on students realizing that they need the services and making the effort to take advantage of them. This isn’t always enough.

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This chapter will explore models of embedded services that the authors have been piloting at their university as part of a proposed online master’s program in Educational Technology. The authors are currently exploring embedding library, writing, and career services into appropriate places in the department’s online program. In the past, students have been encouraged but not required to take advantage of these services following the *Field of Dreams* model of student services: “build it and they will come.” Each of the services has an online presence available to students in the online program, but the services are rarely used.

In the embedded model, services are placed within the course in strategic locations as part of required coursework. Following the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001), the authors understand that relationships are important for distance students. That is, there is a significant difference between creating services and pointing students to them vs. introducing the students to the people providing those services and having scheduled opportunities for them to interact. This has led to the idea of embedding services into the program. By building on the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001), this chapter will show a practical application of this model for student services to become integral parts the program. This will provide a theoretical basis for the authors’ approach.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the literature on embedded services; this idea is not entirely original to the authors. It has been tried in various ways at many institutions. Next, the chapter will explore conditions for educational change described by Donald Ely (1990) and how that theoretical model can inform attempts to increase use of services. This will be followed by an exploration of some of the range of models for implementing embedded services. This is not intended as a definitive list but as a framework for looking at the range of possibilities.

Finally, the chapter looks at a range of issues and concerns with this approach, including: how it impacts in-person, hybrid, and online courses differently; concerns over faculty autonomy when service providers are embedded in a course; and the resource-intensive nature of this model and how it might be scalable.

Dispersed throughout, the authors will describe the pilot efforts and results from embedding services. To date, the authors have piloted embedding a librarian into a research-intensive course and embedding a writing tutor from the Writing Center into a writing-intensive course. As the Educational Technology faculty prepares the program for delivery online, they have become concerned with the *Field of Dreams* model for current and future students. The department’s current hybrid program consists of students who are geographically dispersed with some classes held more than fifty miles away from the campus that houses the university’s library and other services. Student services, including the library, The Writing Center, and career services have done a good job of creating services that can be accessed from a distance, but students who need these and other services often do not take advantage of them. This chapter is describing a different model that will embed these services in the virtual classroom, possibly requiring students to take advantage of them.

As of this writing, the authors have completed the pilot for the embedded librarian and have begun the pilot for the embedded writing tutor. The authors are convinced that additional services like these are needed in the program and will be particularly needed as online course offerings expand. For the library pilot, the authors learned that students tend to think that they can get everything they need with a minimal Google or Google Scholar search, possibly supplemented with a quick look at the ERIC database. Part of the reason for this is that, most of the time, they can do without additional library resources. This program is not intensely focused on student research – no thesis is required – but the faculty do hope that
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