

Pirates for Academic Success

Signature Honors Project

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Abstract

ECU reported in 2019 that the school had an overall retention rate of 83%. Although this percentage seems high, it is nothing compared to UNC Chapel Hill's overall retention rate of 97.2% or Duke's rate of 97.6%, (both reported from 2013-2017.) Because of this our group decided to research why ECU's retention rate was so much lower than surrounding universities and provide resources and information to take a step forward in solving these problems. After spending our first year conducting interviews among students, it was clear that most students were not aware of the resources offered to them on campus. Some were not even aware of their style of learning and how to effectively study for upcoming exams or quizzes. From this we created Pirates for Academic Success. Our goal was to make videos explaining not only what resources were available on campus that you may not know about but also explain different studying techniques and how discovering your style of learning can lead to a more effective study pattern. Doing this allows students who do not know ECU campus that well or who do not know many other students a way to find resources in a less intimidating way. This can lead to higher grades, more confidence in coursework and classes, and a higher chance of students staying at ECU for a second year. "Confident students develop relationships with faculty that can lead to participation in research and other developmental activities...this leads further to potential future connections, letters of recommendation, internships, future work, or graduate school" (Croskey, 2021). Our group has set up a Vimeo containing videos ranging from how to use different online homework platforms such as Cengage to resources at the library students may not be aware of and how to effectively use them. Through this we have established a relationship with the library, marketing our videos and receiving exclusive access to the library to make more videos using their equipment.

Project Development

Honors 2000

Starting in 2000, our class was randomly assigned into groups of six with one task: find a problem within the community you are enthusiastic about and solve it. Although we all came from different backgrounds there was one thing we all had in common, we were all new to college. From this we all related to one struggle which was adopting good study habits. Our problem was established, and our goal became increasing ECU's retention rate. We began to research ECU's statistics through public websites and developed multiple concept maps brainstorming solutions to our problem. After our ideation session we each voted on three ideas that we felt the group should prioritize as a start to solving our problem. The three ideas decided upon were reaching out to the Pirate Academic Success Center, reaching out to COAD professors, and starting a page full of study techniques that are unique to different learning styles.

Although we had some solid ideas and paths we knew we wanted to follow, we still needed to figure out if our idea was something that students would want. From here we started interviews. Our target audience was incoming first-year students. We tried to keep a good balance of first-year students within the honors college and first-year students outside the honors college. Mainly because the honors college does offer extra resources for studying habits that are not available to all students within the university. From interviews we were able to have a decent foundation for what students would want and would use.

While interviewing students, we also reached out to multiple COAD professors in hopes of scheduling an interview. This was done so we could have a look at the syllabus and gain insight into what was already offered to students. We did interview a COAD professor but found

that it was not as helpful as we had hoped. This was our first dead end and helped us learn how to change direction and keep moving forward. So, from here we put more focus into connecting with the PASC.

At this time ECU was moving from blackboard to canvas online. We felt this was an opportunity to create a canvas module outlining good study habits and partner with the PASC to get it put on the incoming freshmen's' dashboard. We established connections with tutors and administration within the PASC as the semester was ending and agreed to meet in moving forward come the spring semester.

Honors 3000

Coming off the 2000 class, we had some solid ideas. We were looking forward to working hard and making some progress on a nailed-down prototype. We also had some changes between the two classes. Our group grew from six to twelve people, which made it more challenging to produce one idea agreed upon by everyone. We knew that the problem we were trying to tackle was students having a challenging time learning in the college environment, especially new students. We began working on implementing Universal Design for Learning into more areas on campus, but especially at the Pirate Academic Success Center. Before spring break, the halfway point in our semester, we planned to start helping the PASC put together canvas pages that students could access, where they could explore multiple ways to implement new study habits. These pages were going to be time management, organization, and learning styles to start. Our data from the admissions office at ECU showed that with fewer students, the school gets less money. ECU loses approximately 1,000 students each year due to academic problems, causing us to get these decreases in budget every year. With these pages in place, we hoped to retain students, which would help with the budgetary issues, but the main goal was to

help students struggling in classes with a new resource for study help.

The PASC was willing to help us all semester with this, providing us with resources to make videos and suggestions for content on the pages. They were incredibly open to us helping them with this project and loved all our input. After spring break, a couple of things going on would affect our project. First, we were not allowed to go back to campus due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 Pandemic. This would put a large standstill on our project since it involved being in person and working with the PASC. Also, after spring break, the PASC released their prototype Canvas page that we were going to work with them on to help students during the pandemic. The page was just YouTube videos and links to help students. We felt this could be advantageous if we decided to move forward to Honors 4500 because we could get input from students about what they think about the page and make changes based on this. The hope was to send out a survey and see what students felt should be changed and what was already good about the page. Releasing this gave us a prototype to work with, and we hoped to add content and implement UDL within it. Once we were confident in our work for the pages we already had planned, we hoped to add new pages, such as adjusting what was already in place for online class help and adding note-taking and textbook reading.

Due to the Pandemic, we left Honors 3000 with many ideas and no physical prototype that we were able to hold. We felt defeated and frustrated that this was the way our hard work would end for the semester. However, six of us decided we would apply to move on to Honors 4500 as a group. Once we got accepted to be a part of the class, we were extremely excited to see how we could create this physical prototype and excited to see our project through to the end.

Honors 4500

This semester presented several different challenges for our group, and we got off to a rocky start. With the impact of Covid-19 still being felt everywhere, it became increasingly difficult to make progress on our project due to many places being shut down. Additionally, our group had to take a major pivot and revamp our project during this semester because the Pirate Academic Success Center created modules like our designs and published them in Canvas without our help before the Fall 2020 semester began. These modules were designed to assist students with online learning while all classes were virtual because of the pandemic. Our group still had intentions of collaborating with the Pirate Academic Success Center and improving the modules they created, but we soon decided to move in a different direction because we felt that it was taking too long to get the approval from the PASC to move forward.

As a result of this pivot, our group became stagnant for a while because no one was sure which direction we wanted to take our project, and we were starting from nothing again. Our group took some time to brainstorm and discuss new potential partners, and a few of our strongest leads were implementing our modules into the COAD 1000 class, meeting with the Dean of Students and potentially implementing our modules into the preexisting modules that all first-year students are required to take before coming onto campus or partnering with someone at Joyner Library. While we reached out to these organizations on campus, we also began making prototype videos so our potential partners could review our work. Our prototype modules included a video on the navigation and resources within Canvas, a video discussing time management tactics, and a video on how to approach courses that have minimal grades/assignments. As a group, we decided there was a need for these videos as ECU shifted to an all-online style of teaching/learning. Our main targets were incoming first-year students and students who are struggling academically, but we hoped to make our videos available to all ECU

students, so they have access to them since communicating and meeting face to face to ask questions was extremely difficult during this time.

After sending our prototype videos to several partnership prospects and receiving feedback, we decided to partner with Heather White and Joyner Library. Heather currently serves as the Assistant Director of Assessment & Engagement for Joyner Library. She seemed pleased with our prototype videos and was excited to help us grow our project and impact as many ECU students as possible. During our team meeting with Heather, we discussed our goals moving forward and created an action plan/timeline for our revamped project. Our group decided to continue making instructional videos for common software and applications that are used by numerous ECU students and form a student-led organization to continue our work after the members from our group have completed the Signature Honors Project and graduated.

As the Honors 4500 semester began to wind down, we had a concrete plan moving forward. Our project had successfully been revamped, and the future was bright for our group. However, our group knew we were nowhere close to where we wanted to be, and we needed to take the next step in our project. A few of our next steps were to continue generating new content about resources throughout Joyner Library and around ECU, meet with people who had experience with technology and video recording/editing, and get approval from the Office of Directors at Joyner Library to proceed with revamping a student board at the library.

Honors 4550

After the conclusion of Honors 4500, our group realized that we had to shift past just planning out videos and modules for the canvas site and needed to start creating a tangible product. So, over Winter break we divided our group into three separate teams with the goal of creating at least three videos each per group. We quickly found that this strategy of divvying up

work between us allowed our group to be more productive, as well consistent in completing videos. Our group also met at least weekly over facetime to track our progress on the videos and to brainstorm ideas regarding networking and student engagement. At the conclusion of Winter break, our group produced ten high quality videos on a variety of programs frequently used by students and tips regarding study habits and learning styles.

Entering the new semester our goal was to relay these videos back to Joyner for feedback, but to also find measures to gauge student engagement on these videos. The first 3 weeks of the semester were used to establish a group plan in terms of what videos needed to be created or re-edited but also as a layover period on creating videos since the first batch was still under review from Heather white. Aside from creating a strategy for the rest semester, we began networking with a variety of students such as student athletes, sorority/fraternity members, and members of other organizations on campus. We met with these students to understand their needs regarding modules, as well as finding interest in a student-run subgroup of the on-campus chapter Friends of Joyner. This subgroup of the chapter would be student led and has the potential to receive funding from the chapter. This subgroup of students would be focused on outreach to the community, networking with students to find their needs at Joyner, and to increase awareness of all the resources Joyner offers. We received great feedback from these students about what their current needs were and how our group and Joyner library could meet their needs.

During weeks 4-6 we received feedback from Heather regarding our videos. She was pleased with their quality and offered for us to use the new one button studio for our future recordings. Moreover, she created a temporary page on Joyner's website for our videos. This page would include our videos, our pictures, and short student profiles. One of the main missions of our project is to not only provide resources to students on campus, but also to be a representation for our peers, which starts with being as personable as possible. We felt that

including a short student biography on each of us would aid in this effort. During these weeks, we met with Tim to discuss the sustainability of our project and to explore how we were going to actively measure student engagement and the success of our modules. We also discussed the continuation of our involvement in the project up until graduation. We agreed that at least two of us would stay involved in the project following the conclusion of Honors 4550. In addition, we brainstormed ways to track the effectiveness of our canvas modules, specifically through website “clicks,” as well as views. However, these two categories measure engagement with the links, rather than the actual success of the content in our videos. So, we included our email and other contact information, where students could ask us questions, as well as comment on what needed to be improved with the videos.

Weeks 7-12 were spent recording additional videos that had been suggested to us by Heather White and other staff at Joyner. Most of these videos were tutorials geared towards navigating Joyner’s website and the resources they offer. We also met with an Honors 3000 with a similar wicked problem, and they asked if we could assist in brainstorming, as well as explaining our journey through our project. This experience was not only beneficial to the Honors 3000 group but was helpful to our group as well. It allowed us to reflect on what things we had done correctly, what missteps we had taken, and how far we had come as a group. In addition to this meeting, we reached out to our fellow Honors 4550 group Find Your Voice to receive advice on social media engagement. Find Your Voice had a successful following on Instagram and other social media platforms, which is something that we had struggled with as a group.

The last weeks of Honors 4550 were spent meeting reviewing our latest videos with Heather White at Joyner library, as well as recording a promotional video for Joyner’s new One Button Studio. This promotional opportunity not only benefited Joyner Library, but us as well as

it increased our group's exposure. As mentioned previously, at least two of us will be moving forward with the project, working to facilitate any improvements with our videos, as well as networking with other students to increase our success on campus.

Results

The result of our project is the videos we made that were posted to the Joyner Library website. A description and link to each video is provided below.

- How to Be Successful in Courses with Limited Grade Opportunities:

<https://vimeo.com/474397863>

Description: This video is a set of helpful tips and tricks for students, to help them achieve their goals in courses that have only a couple of assignments, such as three tests and a final. This video was necessary for us to make because there is a plethora of students who are coming in from high school, where there are normally dozens of assignments per class, which is often not the case in college. The first tip covered by Lucas is get a planner and use it. This is essential for staying on top of assignments, and planning enough time to study for each course, as well as fitting in time for work or volunteering. The second tip Lucas gave was to study daily, and not cram. It can be tempting to not study for classes throughout the year, but this is very harmful both to your grades, and to your information retention. His third tip is to find out what study style from the VARK questionnaire works for you personally. This questionnaire offers four different study styles; Visual, Aural, Reading/Writing, and Kinesthetic, and has helpful tips for learning with each study style. The fourth tip Lucas gives is to block out potential distractions when studying. Some ways of doing this are turning your phone or tv off, and going to a quiet place, such as a study room. This goes hand in hand with taking breaks during your studying, every 45 minutes or so. The final tip from the video is to exhaust all your options. The PASC is a great

resource for receiving help in your classes, and when utilized properly can help with passing classes and truly learning the information you are being taught.

- Canvas - Introduction: <https://vimeo.com/474022632>

Description: This is a short introductory video, introducing the topics we are going to be discussing in the following Canvas videos, such as how to navigate Canvas, some of the available tools, and how to turn in work on the site.

- Canvas - Dashboard: <https://vimeo.com/474022626>

Description: This video describes the things that are visible on the dashboard of the Canvas page. These things include an overview of all the courses you are currently enrolled in, a to-do list with all your assignments on it, and recent feedback from your professors on your work. Clicking on a course will direct you to that course's home page.

- Canvas - Course Home Page: <https://vimeo.com/474023006>

Description: This video explores what can be seen on the course home page, such as the overview of all available tabs for the specific course. This includes things such as announcements, assignments, discussions, and grades.

- Canvas - Assignments: <https://vimeo.com/474023052>

Description: This video is discussing where to find all the assignments that are due, past, and future, for your course. It also goes into depth on the features that will be found on individual assignments, such as the total points/grade, when it is due, how to do it, and how many attempts are allotted for that specific assignment. There will also be some assignments that require file submissions. These will have the specified file type for you to submit, and they will be turned in by starting the assignment, uploading said file type, and submitting the assignment.

- Canvas - Discussions: <https://vimeo.com/474023101>

Description: The discussions video for the Canvas module, is describing how to use the discussion board feature on Canvas. These assignments are found in the discussions portion of the assignments tab. The instructor will post requirements for the topic, and length of the discussion, as well as if you are required to respond to the posts of peers. You will respond by clicking reply on another students' post, and then submitting your response. There are often discussion board posts that are blocked from view until you have made your own initial post.

- Canvas - Calendar: <https://vimeo.com/474023123>

Description: This video is about the Canvas feature known as the calendar. This is one of the most useful aspects of Canvas, as it can work as a built-in planner. It shows exactly what is due, when it is due, and is color coded for what class it is due in. It is a wonderful way to stay on top of your assignments and is invaluable for tracking what you have coming up.

- Canvas - Inbox: <https://vimeo.com/474023189>

Description: The inbox on Canvas can hold a wide variety of communications from professors. Everything from grade feedback to announcements, as well as direct communication between you and them. It is a wonderful way to supplement your student email.

- Time Management: <https://vimeo.com/476930657>

Description: The time management video is a series of strategies that can be beneficial for time management in college. The first tip is to keep a calendar and use it. Plan out your weekday by day, and write down all information you hear about events, when you hear about them. In addition to a big calendar, it is helpful to create a day-to-day plan to help you schedule your daily life, for things such as schoolwork and studying. The second tip is to balance your workload. You do not want to overwhelm yourself and spreading out your workload throughout the week is extremely helpful for learning and processing information. Along with this, providing yourself

with breaks throughout the day and week can help to prevent burnout and overload. The third tip is to set specific and measurable goals. An effective way to do this is to break major assignments down into smaller, more achievable benchmark goals. This is immensely helpful for keeping on track, and mentally rewarding yourself for the work you have managed to get done. The next tip is to avoid distractions. Isolating yourself or turning your phone off can be extremely helpful for keeping you on track for your work. The last set of tips are less specific, and broader for general success. These include things such as getting enough sleep, eating good foods, utilizing all resources that ECU offers, and preparing your syllabi before the semester begins. In addition, you can check your course canvas page to find out if you know any of your peers in your class, who you may be able to study or work with.

- ECU Award: <https://vimeo.com/492365304>

Description: This video is a helpful guide for submitting applications to the ECU Award portal, and what it can provide. This is our university scholarship portal, which can match students to ECU specific scholarships. When visiting the site, it will give a description of what it does, as well as how to use it to your advantage. You can find a list of all the scholarships that ECU offers. To start your application process, you will sign in with your ECU information, and create your general application which will be used to automatically apply to some of the more general scholarships. To give yourself the best shot at getting selected, add things to this general application that really show the review boards who you truly are, and why you deserve to receive the scholarship money. You can apply to as many scholarships as you want, and while some of them may require additional information, they will all utilize the general application.

- Connect: <https://vimeo.com/492365505>

Description: This video dives into the Connect and Smart Book software. This is used within the business department, to learn and assess knowledge. To gain access, your professor will provide you with an access code, after which you can join the class and purchase the necessary materials. On the main page, you will have all the classes you are registered for available to view. Once selecting one of these classes, you will be able to view the past due, open, and yet unavailable assignments for the course. If it is past due, there will be a padlock symbol on the assignment, and it will be unavailable for opening. On the far left of the page, you will be able to find all the textbooks you have access to, whether you desire a physical book or just the online copy. In addition, on Connect there is a LearnSmart or Smart Book option. This software is a fantastic way to practice and test your knowledge, and professors often take advantage of these tools to assign work on them. However, even when not assigned, it is often still available to students. The Connect site also includes specific calendar dates for when assignments are due, and does this both via a list, and an optional calendar setting. After completing assignments, you can review them, and look at the questions and your answers. Lastly, Connect has an insights tab, which is a helpful graph for showing your grades on assignments throughout the semester.

- How to Navigate TopHat: <https://vimeo.com/492556347>

Description: This program is often used for assignments and coursework for certain classes. It does cost money, but the textbook is included in this price. The software is broken into classroom, assigned, and gradebook tabs, however the assigned tab is where most of the work will take place. This tab is where all the homework will be and is also where the textbook is. The modules will have questions for you to answer, based on the text provided. These questions are not meant to trick you, they are for a reading check. There is also an unanswered tab that will show how many questions you have yet to answer before your next due date, which can also be

divided into modules. There are also often tests assigned through Top Hat, which can be accessed by a code provided by professors. The main issue with testing on TopHat would be that working on a MacBook can cause you to get locked out of your test if you receive a text or facetime, even if you do not engage with the notification. To solve this issue, put your laptop on do not disturb, and you will be fine.

- How to Navigate Cengage/Webassign: <https://vimeo.com/492553713>

Description: The Cengage/Webassign is exceedingly popular at ECU. Like TopHat, the subscription costs money, but includes the textbook information and access. The home tab summarizes the overview of what is coming up for you in the course. The communications tab is the place for you to get up with your professor and ask questions you are looking for the answers to. There is a grades tab that will have your graded assignments on it. Once again, the major tab is going to be the assignments tab. There are many helpful insights on assignments, such as your current grades for the questions you have answered, and what your grade will be at your current completion. You are also able to ask your professor about specific questions, through an easy link at the bottom of each question, which makes it easy to communicate with your professor to better learn the information. Cengage also hosts a calendar on their site, which allows you to see your due dates and assignments.

- Ask a Librarian: <https://vimeo.com/515460179>

Description: This video describes the “ask a librarian” page on ECU’s Joyner website. This page offers students the ability to contact a librarian from Joyner. On the top of the page, there is a link to a FAQ page, where many of the most frequent questions will be asked. However, if your question is not answered by this page, you can find information by email, text, call, or even Webex with a librarian directly, where they can assist you.

- Tutorials Provided by Joyner Library: <https://vimeo.com/515461183>

Description: Joyner Library offers many tutorials on their “tutorials” page. The tutorials include things such as library research, graduate school research, and database use. There are often links to YouTube videos, which can be helpful to students who need to find additional information, beyond what the library themselves provide.

- E-Textbook Resources at Joyner: <https://vimeo.com/515461377>

Description: Joyner Library has partnered with Dowdy bookstores to provide students with e-textbooks that they can access to save some money. These books can be accessed through the library catalog, course catalog, and e-textbook database on the Joyner Library website. To check the availability of your eBook, you can search the book name, the course name, or even your professor's name to find what you need. As always, if you need help, you can contact the librarians to do so.

- Borrowing Equipment at Joyner: <https://vimeo.com/515462180>

Description: To borrow equipment from Joyner Library, first you must visit their “borrow equipment” page. This page offers students the ability to check out many different kinds of equipment. Their equipment offered includes many things, such as calculators, laptops, and phone chargers. To combat the issues caused by the Covid pandemic, Joyner offered a learn from home kit, which included things such as a hotspot, whiteboard, and even a printer. Some of these items can be rented out for a semester at a time and can be picked up at the Joyner circulation desk. The Health Sciences Library, and the Music Library offer a similar service for item rentals.

- A Brief Overview of Joyner Library’s Website: <https://vimeo.com/492204496>

Description: The Joyner Library website offers many different resources to students. The site offers students options such as research resources, direct help from librarians, and services.

The online resources are easy to navigate and hold a plethora of information. The services section revolves around in person activities at Joyner, such as checking out books and other rental resources. There is also a get help tab that students can use to find the ask a library and contact pages. This is just a brief overview of the many resources that the Joyner Library site offers.

- Visible Body: <https://vimeo.com/492214461>

Description: This site is primarily going to be used by students who are currently enrolled in Anatomy and Physiology courses at ECU. There are five sections to this software: views, quizzes, tours, favorites, and notecards. In the views section, a variety of bodily systems can be reviewed. There is a plethora of options for the review of various body groups, injuries, and diseases within this section of the site. There are descriptions, pronunciations, and many different methods of viewing body parts offered here, which is great for truly learning the body. In the quizzes section, there are many different body sections listed for various quizzes to be taken. In the tour section, the user can see the body in layers, starting from bone, and moving all the way to the skin. This is great for users seeing how the body is layered, and how deep different muscles and tendons go. In the favorites section, the user can save views that they feel the need to study more often, as it makes it easy to differentiate and study this group. Lastly, there is a notecard section, which can be used to overlay note cards on various views. These notes are great for helping with information that is necessary, or difficult for the user to learn.

Individual Contribution

Throughout this project, there have been many challenging moments. However, through my group's hard work and sense of team, we all got to the point we are today. Some of the most challenging moments were rooted in communication. There were many days when we all felt

there were so many options and ideas that we could not choose one. Instead of choosing one and running, we did not communicate, and production on our project very suddenly stopped. To prevent this from happening in the future, we decided to split into three pairs of two. This strategy gave the whole group an accountability partner to keep each person motivated and on schedule. My partner helped me continue working on frustrating and complex topics. Our project was made better through the use of partners in a larger group.

My main contributions came from the organization of the project. I was the one who kept all our meeting minutes when we met. I had our document set up with the list of videos that needed to be made and wrote down which pairing was doing which video on this document. I set up all our meetings with our advisor. I did final edits on our presentations and papers that needed to be submitted. I kept track of deadlines and tasks that needed to be completed. Even though I did not see myself as the face of the group, or the one with all the ideas, I was the one behind the scenes that kept us on track. I did contribute to the ideation throughout our project. However, I feel my main contribution to the group was just as important as the creative side of the process.

All the classes for this Signature Honors Project have taught me so much about myself. I have learned how to work with and communicate with a group of people to reach a common goal. Some of the most complex parts of this project were created by the size of our team. We had twelve group members in Honors 3000 and six in Honors 4500. The size made it hard to communicate and delegate tasks at times, but the project forced me to find a way to do this anyway. These classes and this project have also taught me the importance of constructive criticism. After graduation, I am going to be working in the accounting field. This field is known for having people send you revisions and corrections on your work consistently. This class has taught me to take those corrections and criticisms and use them to make myself and my work

even better. I genuinely believe this project and these classes overall have taught me so many lessons that I can carry into my personal life and my future career.

Conclusion

Developing this project was a learning experience for all our group members and was an effective way to give back to our school and community. New challenges were presented that we had to develop ways to overcome. While many pivots were involved at various points throughout the course of our project, they all were necessary to create the final product, and all served to teach us about the design process. Several times we had to switch community partners to further the goal of our project and achieve the best outcomes. Attempting to create a complete set of educational videos, as well as an organization to maintain and update the materials and information within those videos, was a daunting and challenging task to accomplish during a global pandemic. While all of this was challenging and stressful, we always came together as a team and found support from our partners and were fulfilled by our ability to give back to the university.

Works Cited

ACO Staff Writers. "Building Confidence Activities for College Students." *Affordable Colleges Online*, 1 Nov. 2021, <https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center/confidence-college-classroom/>.