



Successful Practices for Supporting Distance Learners

A research project funded by



www.alberta-north.ca

Successful Practices for Supporting Distance Learners

This report was prepared by Janice Letkeman McQuilkin and Valerie Neaves for Alberta-North.

For copies of this publication visit: <http://www.alberta-north.ca/> and <http://www.ecampusalberta.ca/>

Alberta-North has made every effort to obtain copyright permission. Please bring any omissions to our attention at the following address: Box 9, Faust, AB, T0G 0X0.

Copyright © 2009, Alberta-North and its licensors. This document is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.5 Canada Licence. This licence allows you to share, copy, distribute, transmit, and adapt the work. You must attribute the work with a credit to eCampusAlberta and Alberta-North. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the coordinators who participated in the Alberta-North survey in 2008. Without your feedback, these ideas, successful practices and shared challenges would not be in print.

Thank you to eCampusAlberta <http://www.ecampusalberta.ca/> for funding this research project.

Thank you to Bill Fricker and all vested parties that participated in the initial report and data collection.

Successful Practices for Supporting Distance Learners

Table Of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	6
Welcome.....	8
Chapter Overview	8
Additional References.....	9
Chapter 1: Communicating Course and Program Information.....	10
Communicating Course and Program Information	10
Handling Inquiries.....	13
Disseminating Information.....	14
Delivering Presentations	17
Chapter 2: Establishing the Facility.....	19
Setting Up the Facility	19
Chapter 3: Learning Support.....	21
Chapter 4: General Student Services	23
Student Services Ideas	23
Chapter 5: Providing Academic Support	25
Successful Academic Support Practices.....	25
Academic Support Challenge Ideas	26
Chapter 6: Student Retention and Achievement	28
Student Retention and Achievement	28
Facing Challenges in Student Retention and Achievement	28
Successful Practices for Student Retention and Achievement.....	29
Chapter 7: Course Support	31
Chapter 8: Coordinating Employment Services	32
Successful Employment Service Practices	32
Chapter 9: Additional Educational Support Ideas	33
References.....	35

Executive Summary

The Community Access Point (CAP) Coordinator is the first point of contact for students who may be new users of a distance delivery through a college or Post Secondary Education (PSE) program. The role of the CAP Coordinator is to communicate course and program information and serve as customer service agents for students as well as representing partner institutions delivering distance education, courses and programs. Coordinators try to: encourage cooperation and communication between institutions so that courses and programs receive support, they blend facilities so that library, office, computer and support services are made available, they work to create efficiencies through shared resources, recruit community resources, establish partnerships with local industry and coordinate employment services.

The two biggest challenges this report presents are: the roles and responsibilities of support and secondly, communication between coordinators, representing institutions and governments. For this reason, best practices are a collaborative effort across learning providers, community, government, students and CAP Coordinators.

Clearly, the most challenging area concerns the question of who provides learning support. According to the feedback provided, the coordinator is required to investigate and figure out whom is responsible for providing support for each course and program that they are expected to advertise; Is it the responsibility of the delivery site, the institution representing the course or program, or a government responsibility? The answer to this question appears to vary with each participating site. Some directly provide the support, some provide an integrated approach, while others refer all support online or by booking appointments. The concept of support runs the full spectrum from directing students to the community library to a full menu of career and personal counseling and advising options. The role of support is dependent upon available site resources, in many rural and remote communities the CAP Coordinator is the sole person for contact and student inquiries, in other locations the CAP Coordinator can refer people down the hall to other support staff to answer questions, offer resources and provide support. For those coordinators facing little to no on-site support, they feel overwhelmed with the task of providing support in addition to the main responsibilities of their job, the amount of support information they need to know to stay current, and the specific skills and training required to assist students.

The second most challenging area for coordinators is establishing communication with instructors or institutional representatives on the student's behalf. Emailing has limitations when discussing student issues and using the telephone often requires multiple calls, transfers and voicemail to finally reach the appropriate person and then establish a time to actually discuss the issue — assuming the real person is the correct contact. Given this responsibility, having ready access to the particular institution contact information and communicated clarification of designated roles and responsibilities is fundamental.

Providing academic support from a coordinator's perspective includes: training students how to use a computer, conduct research on web sites, locate necessary institutional supports (funding, counseling), access library databases, study and promote work life balance. Coordinators administer exams, obtain correct forms and access codes, monitor student progress with instructors, assist students with learning disabilities and arrange for social and health care

workers. For most of the responsibilities in the academic area, students and institutions also need to hone their best practices.

In conclusion, CAP Coordinators need access and guidance in terms of various key program supports including: strong communication links to instruction and program leads, continual updates and guidance through the virtual "corn maze" of policy, procedures and dynamic institution information. This can include: professional development, regular communication, frequent updates, tip sheets and a form of online virtual support from all representing institutions in student services, programs, counseling and procedures.

Institutions with CAP sites need to ensure that staff know who CAP Coordinators are and what site they represent. For example, the switchboard needs to be informed of the CAP Coordinators, their sites and current contact information. While this is current practice for some representing institutions, this needs to be a consistent practice of fine tuning communication and customer service for all.

Welcome

The purpose of this guide is to present successful practices of community-based learning facilities with particular emphasis on rural and remote areas in northern Alberta including Métis Settlements and First Nations Reserves. The suggestions, ideas, practices and challenges presented here originate from a research project funded by eCampusAlberta in December 2008 asking individuals from community-based learning facilities to share their successful practices and present challenges. The feedback presented here is from the information collected and is shared for the benefit of students, representative institutions, government, and coordinators.

This guide is designed to be a reference of information containing recommendations for successful practices, suggested checklists, useful suggestions, practical ideas and common challenges. Where appropriate, chapters contain a check list summarizing items for ease of reference according to *area of responsibility*, *check when complete*, *description of task* and *comment* columns. The area of responsibility column is shared between four stakeholder groups: CAP Coordinators, institutional systems, government (municipal, provincial and federal) and students. It should be recognized that while CAP Coordinators bear the majority of responsibilities listed in this guide, there are a number of responsibilities that the aforementioned stakeholders need to accept for *Successful Practices* to be fully realized.

Chapter Overview

This guide contains the following chapters and content:

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Description</i>
Chapter 1: Program and Course Information	Institutional internal and external marketing, how to handle inquiries, disseminating information checklist, communicating program and course information, preparing and distributing various materials, making presentations, marketing strategies and challenges
Chapter 2: Establishing the Facility	Setting up the facility, scheduling study space and equipment and establishing a facility checklist
Chapter 3: Providing Learning Support	Providing exam invigilation, organizing referrals to counseling and advising for educational planning, successful learning support practices and identifying challenges
Chapter 4: General Student Services	Providing admission services, helping with registration and fee payments, liaising between instructor, delivery of course program information and identifying student service challenges

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Description</i>
Chapter 5: Providing Academic Support	Coordinating academic support and soft skill development, initiating successful support ideas, and addressing academic support challenges.
Chapter 6: Student Retention and Achievement	Retaining students, coordinating ways to assist current challenges in student retention and achievement, implementing and sharing successful practices for student retention and achievement
Chapter 7: Providing Course Support	Coordinating learning circles, booking, reserving space and equipment for student use, contacting instructor and program coordinators
Chapter 8: Coordinating Employment Services	Coordinating access to employment readiness services, preparing resumes, practicing interviews, setting up exploratory tours, coordinating with employers and industry
Chapter 9: Additional Educational Support Ideas	Coordinating creative ways to support learners pursuing education

Additional References

For specific participant comments, survey questions and section descriptions please refer to *Successful Practices for Supporting Distance Learners*, December 2008 listed in the References section of this manual.

Chapter 1: Communicating Course and Program Information

Course and Program Information refers to courses, programs, workshops, materials or sessions offered to students including various related services.

This chapter describes ways to:

- Communicate program and course information.
- Handle inquiries.
- Disseminate information.
- Deliver presentations.
- Apply marketing strategies.

Given the many responsibilities coordinators have, a check list is provided to list the many suggestions provided in the feedback.

Communicating Course and Program Information

Involvement of partnering institutions is foundational to the support and success of distance learning sites. In the area of course and program information, institutions need to create opportunities for key college players to meet via distance learning platforms, create supportive networks and professional development initiatives, establish regular sharing of best practices, outline a communication plan, provide regular engagements with institutional representatives and create support structure for CAP coordinators. Governments at the federal, provincial and municipal levels need to streamline the funding processes and provide the necessary financial support. The top two areas students' struggle the most are the costs associated with the need for daycare and access to transportation.

The following suggestions are directed towards institutions and government in order to create a supportive and collaborative network with coordinators.

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Collaborative Program Development Events						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Description of Task	Comments
C	I	G	S			
	•				Create opportunities for key college players to meet and greet via distance learning platforms. For example, invite guest speakers from institutions for online orientations, invite them to the Alberta-North Access Symposium, offer consistent communication links to key people who help with access to programs and students services to CAP Coordinators and students.	
	•				Create supportive network and professional development initiatives for CAP Coordinators on Moodle.	
	•				Establish regular sharing of best practices between all CAP Coordinators, team building activities and monthly information sharing via Moodle.	
	•				Reward CAP Coordinators with Certificates of Best Practice and community stewardship.	
	•				Provide regular engagements with key institutional representatives, guest speakers for a Q and A online with CAP Coordinators.	
	•				Create consistent templates describing the role of CAP Coordinator and institutional responsibilities.	
	•				Create support structure for CAP Coordinator and communication plan with institutions.	
	•				Offer funding training for CAP Coordinators to be briefed by funding experts at the institution including <i>helpful tip sheets</i> .	
		•			Streamline funding processes.	
	•				Implement a 1-800 number so that all colleges work and collaborate as one, for counseling, advising and funding questions.	
		•			Provide financial support for students struggling with daycare and transportation.	

Collaborative Program Development Events						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Description of Task	Comments
C	I	G	S			
	•				Offer more career and educational preparatory courses for potential students in an online workshop.	

As a CAP Coordinator, one of the most important responsibilities is knowing where to find course and program information to pass on to others. Course and program information may be presented in different forms (For example, calendars, brochures, Web sites, posters or email). It is important to understand how online courses and programs work and know where to obtain and locate these sources of information. The following checklist is a collection of recommendations from coordinators to help you get started.

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Course and Program Information						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Description of Task	Comments
C	I	G	S			
•	•				Provide tip sheets to interested students, numbers to call, web-links, frequently asked questions, Q and A.	
•					Visited and know how to navigate the web site of each institution to find their calendar and various key contact numbers.	
•					Able to direct clients to appropriate course and programs to match their skill, interest and ability.	
•	•				Visited and saved web pages of various institutions on the topic of: career options, interview preparation and distance education programs and courses.	

Course and Program Information						
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Description of Task</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>S</i>			
•					Discovered where to obtain need assessment and advising services for clients.	
•					Found and written down the name, phone number and email address of important institution, college, community contacts.	
•	•		•		Established a list of contacts from various institutions. For example, a simplified cheat sheet for CAP Coordinators from each institution.	
•			•		Located web site tours for various institutions.	
•					Saved the web site in your Favourites folder.	
•					Located and saved the web pages that describe available course and program information.	
•					Navigated to the web pages that describe student services.	
•					Practiced explaining how a distance education or online course works.	

Handling Inquiries

When people ask questions, need information or need help, here are some helpful tips to keep in mind.

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Handling Inquiries							
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Helpful Tip Description	Comments	
C	I	G	S				
•	•				Complete a follow-through with client. Follow through is important.		
•	•	•	•		Treat people with respect.		
•	•				Make clients feel comfortable, respected and wanted so they come back.		
•	•		•		Make a good first impression.		
•	•				Make a difference in that person's life to make your job worthwhile.		
•	•				Prepare your answer in advance when someone asks about specific courses, how to register or where the course is offered.		

Disseminating Information

Getting the word out into your community about available courses and programs takes time. Disseminating course and program information is principally the coordinator's responsibility and involves building communication lines between high school and post secondary, getting the word out via email, fax, posters, brochures, presentations, calendars, booths and local media outlets such as newspaper, radio stations and community bulletin boards. Advertising course and program information requires establishing contacts within the local community, advance preparation before delivering the actual presentation or speech, obtaining existing presentation packages, communicating with high school counselors, job start agencies, program advisors and institution contacts. And to truly understand what a student experiences, completing a distance education course.

Some methods of disseminating information require a long-term effort especially when establishing partnerships within industry to initiate on-the-job training programs, maintaining reliable Internet service, understanding how institutions work together to provide course and programs, sorting out how students can obtain funding for their needs and identifying the appropriate representative to help guide them through the funding process. Here are some proven coordinating practices to assist you. These best practices apply to both institutional representatives and CAP Coordinators.

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Disseminating Information							
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Helpful Tip Description</i>	<i>Comments</i>	
C	I	G	S				
•	•		•		Built common educational routes between high school and post-secondary so that students are better prepared and staff can advise.		
•	•				Offered online courses and technology to small numbers in each community at the same time.		
•	•	•	•		Considered and planned how traditional knowledge relevant to First Nations, Métis and Immigrants might be incorporated into courses and programs.		
•	•				Disseminated information on the different programs available. If possible facilitate during a student's online learning session.		
•	•				Emailed or faxed new courses or program being offered in the community. If possible tailor a course to fit clients.		
•	•				Focused on providing individualized attention and networking skills.		
•	•		•		Emailed students web site link resources for those who may prefer to research elsewhere.		
•	•				Scheduled staff, who are willing to be available during working hours to assist and advise.		
•					Displayed course and program information in the entrance foyer of the site and encourage community members to drop by, have a coffee, and discuss upgrading options.		

Disseminating Information						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Helpful Tip Description	Comments
C	I	G	S			
•	•				Established an area where information is available to potential users at the college?	
•	•				Positioned posters describing highlighted courses in strategic places throughout community?	
•					Asked Post Secondary Education (PSE) to announce new courses and programs over the local radio station?	
•	•				Understood the importance of providing good customer service?	
•	•		•		Approached people wandering the hallways in the college and ask if they need help?	
•	•				Prepared answers to common questions of inquiry?	
•	•				Displayed brochures, posters and calendars in main reception area?	
•	•	•	•		Investigated to the best of your ability ways to work with the challenges of basic needs such as transportation, childcare services, and computer availability.	
•	•		•		Prepared student expectations by explaining that with the upcoming cold weather, computer services may be unreliable.	

Some of the ways to improve how course and program information is disseminated to the community takes time and requires a long term effort. In the table below some of the longer term goals are outlined.

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Disseminating Information					
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Long-Term Goal
C	I	G	S		
•	•	•			Establish partnerships within industry to encourage long-term training of individuals especially when students are lured into high paying jobs.
	•	•	•		Maintaining reliable Internet service may be a constant challenge that is beyond your control and expertise. Talk to the experts, establish contacts and investigate what others are doing.
	•	•			Understanding how institutions work together to provide courses and programs for client's takes time and approaches differ with each institution. For instance, one institution encourages students to make direct contact but not into an appropriate program while another may not provide direct contact but offers a good match of skills and abilities for the client. Take the best approach and work for a solution.
•	•	•			Funding for childcare, transportation, government funding may require more time to achieve. Investigate what is available so that at least you have the information. Explore alternatives.

Delivering Presentations

When learning how you might establish contacts within the local community or preparing to present information to others, consider trying these successful practices:

- Prepare a week in advance and practice before you deliver your presentation.
- Ask Alberta-North how to obtain pre-made PowerPoint slides to present at various community meetings.
- Present at trade shows, education fairs, parent/teacher interviews, community, business community groups, local employment agencies.
- Communicate with high school counselor and job start employment agency.
- Use community bulletin boards and newspaper ads.
- Speak with program advisors and connect them with students.
- Liaison with high schools.
- Welcome students to the CAP site by encouraging them to discuss goals, aspirations and be exposed to literature and course offerings colleges offer.

- Setup a booth at local events, contact Welcome Wagon and make brochures with program information available.
- Make phone calls to institutions on behalf of students.
- Use local radio, local channels, posters, visit communities four to six times per year, meet with Local Land Corps, associations, individuals, career fair and recruiters.
- Take a distance education course yourself — just for the experience.
- Encourage client interests and training choices.
- Use WEP page, radio, weekly newspaper, event advertising, on-site resource library, on-site public access computers for career and education searches, and support staff to assist with searches.
- Conduct meetings with all student support personnel each spring to outline all program and course changes.

Chapter 2: Establishing the Facility

When establishing a facility, it is the coordinator's responsibility to create a welcoming atmosphere in their community learning center that includes: a quiet dedicated learning space for students to study that is safe, tidy, organized and inviting. Each facility is different and each community of learners expresses various needs for a learning comfort. Schedules of room and space must be shared, staff hours need to accommodate student needs, wheelchair access is ideal, technical support to maintain office equipment (printers, FAX, telephone, scanners, photocopiers), computers (hardware, software, Internet) and specialized equipment (video-conference, audio-visual). The facility is the centre for student registration, admission, exam invigilation, educational planning and a place for a cup of coffee.

This chapter describes how to:

- Set up the facility.
- Schedule study space and equipment.
- Establish a facility checklist.

Setting Up the Facility

When setting up a facility, coordinators emphasize the importance of establishing a quiet dedicated learning space for students to study that is welcoming, safe, tidy, organized and inviting. Each facility is different and each community of learners will express various facility needs. Ideal conditions for providing and maintaining this space include:

- Flexible schedules when rooms or space must be shared.
- More staff hours to extend opening hours.
- Wheelchair access for locations where stair travel is required.
- Technical support to maintain office equipment (printers, fax, telephone, scanners, photocopiers), computers (hardware, software, Internet) and specialized equipment (video-conference, audio visual).
- Reliable Internet access.

Communication is key to achieving a welcoming atmosphere for learners. The following proposals to establish a welcoming atmosphere provide you with some ideas.

- Encourage cooperation between institutions so that courses and programs receive support.
- Encourage communication between campuses.
- Blend facilities so that library, office, computer and support services are made available when needed by students.

- Create efficiencies through shared resources; run community learning, post-secondary programs, literacy programs, a career and employment centre and a volunteer centre together. The programs can share technology, office supplies, equipment, software and space and all associated costs. Share services such as administration, marketing, IT support, accounting and reception.
- Try cross training between institutions and cross pollination of programs.
- Create community learning centres within the community with access to equipment and resources to assist student with registration, admission, invigilation and educational planning.

On the topic of facilities, follows are best practice recommendations:

- Create a written room reservation schedule.
- Establish student orientation to set expectations and include topics: computer time sign-up procedures, how to find resources, web site navigation, courier delivery times, advising services, student funding, and educational planning.
- Partner with other institutions, local business and First Nations in the sharing resources, equipment and facilities for the purpose of educational or employment activities.
- Choose a well marked location, for ease of access.

Chapter 3: Learning Support

Learning supports are a shared responsibility of the coordinator to provide directly or separately at the learning site. However, institutions and government are also responsible for the provision and successful practices of learning supports.

This chapter describes ways to:

- Provide learning support.
- Successful learning support practices.
- Establishing learning support contacts.

Of all the responsibilities for coordinators, exam invigilation is mentioned the most with providing timely appropriate learner support coming in second. The distinction between handling inquiries and providing learning support is one of timing. Handling inquiries occur in the beginning of the timeline whereas learning support assumes that a student is in the process of pursuing courses or programs.

The overall message from coordinators is that they strive to provide the best support but often are overwhelmed with other responsibilities of their job, the amount of support information they need to know to stay current and the specific skills and training they need to know in order to assist students. As well as, establishing who has the responsibility of providing the support. For example, is it the responsibility of the delivery site, the institution presenting the course/program or, a government responsibility? This appears to vary with each participating site. Some directly provide the support; some provide an integrated approach, while others refer all support to online or by booking appointments. The concept of support runs the full spectrum from directing students to the community library to a full menu of career/personal counseling, advising options.

What is consistent from the feedback however, are the types of support, resources and training that is required for CAP Coordinators can pass on the knowledge. The required type of support includes:

- Library resources.
- Internet resources.
- Assist students to become more self-directed in finding resources and study habits.
- Institution support services.
- Educational planning.
- Career counseling.
- Student funding.

Coordinating this support within a community needs to involve:

- Local library
- High school counselors
- First Nations, local band office and band council members
- Post Secondary Education (PSE) institution administration, counseling, student finance,
- Community business
- Interagency teams (community agencies – who meet regularly)
- Government employment and training centres.

Chapter 4: General Student Services

This chapter describes ways to:

- Provide general student services.
- Successful student services practices.
- Manage student services.

The coordinator assumes a key role in providing effective customer service by advocating for student's success in important administrative ways. Participant response indicated the main areas of responsibility and conflict is assuming role of advocate in support of student issues. The support role described by participants includes:

- Volunteering outside business hours to provide student support.
- Referring to resource web site, institution contact info, 1-800 numbers.
- Receiving, recording and relaying messages for students.
- Listening to students.
- Guiding students to the right area for information.
- Managing student frustration.
- Maintaining communication lines between institution and student.
- Double-checking completed student applications for accuracy.
- Communicating to students about courier services.
- Managing financial transactions involving registration.
- Contacting instructors for students.
- Conducting or coordinating student orientation sessions.
- Recording support issues in a book, a description of the issue, the date, how questions were answered, the resources used, contact information and whether the issue was/is resolved.

Student Services Ideas

Of all these responsibilities, the most challenging for coordinators is establishing communication with instructors/institutional representatives on the student's behalf given that the communication is via email and telephone and often requires multiple calls, transfers and voicemail to finally reach the appropriate person and then establish a time to actually discuss the issue. Given this responsibility, having ready **access to the particular institution contact information, and understanding designated roles and responsibilities is fundamental.**

The support role in a simple form is often the coordinator. In larger sites, there are more professionally certified resources and less scheduling issues. Timely access to some of these services for small towns or remote and rural communities is difficult (counseling, assessments, career advising, program advising).

According to the CAP Coordinators' experience, the role of support is entirely upon the coordinator's shoulders. They are often required to track down resource people from various institutions to follow up student issues. The coordinators express a gap in their knowledge of who to contact. Although there is mention of the need to run student orientation sessions so that students can be responsible for their learning, the coordinators are quick to admit their own need for their training. They recognize the importance to be well informed to better aid students. Each representative institution has various procedures that may further confuse the ability to offer timely and constructive guidance to the students' varying needs. Collaboration and communication between partnering institutions is essential for establishing a support structure allowing CAP Coordinators to be well-informed support for students.

Chapter 5: Providing Academic Support

This chapter describes ways to:

- Provide academic support.
- Apply soft skills for support.
- Coordinate successful support ideas.
- Address academic support challenges.

Successful Academic Support Practices

Coordinators provide academic support by applying their soft skills with encouragement, listening and allowing students to vent. The following list details ways to provide academic support:

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Academic Support Practices						
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Description of Suggestion</i>	<i>Comments</i>
C	I	G	S			
•	•		•		Train students on how to research using books, online web sites and library databases.	
•	•		•		Teach students how to use computer and software.	
•			•		If possible, attend a first class with the student to gain information from the instructor and assist student with using technology.	
•			•		Navigate access and search library databases with and alongside student.	
•					Explain course outlines to students.	
•					Contact delivering institutions on behalf of students.	

Academic Support Practices						
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Description of Suggestion</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>S</i>			
•	•		•		Introduce new students, when possible, with students who have used the technologies before and taken a similar program of study and are still attending site courses.	

The following successful practices are proposed:

- Coordinate a very simple introductory online course or workshop prior to enrolling in a regular course to give student confidence in the procedures.
- Determine if Internet connection is reliable and consistent to deliver a course via distance.
- Praise, encourage, and listen to students especially during exam time when they are feeling overwhelmed and ready to quit school. Focus on what they started, why they started, and how far they've come.
- Encourage students to fill out course/instructor evaluations honestly.
- Go over course outline with student so you have a better idea of the type of support each student needs. Ask students what their needs are and how you can assist them.

Academic Support Challenge Ideas

When faced with challenges in academic support, here are some excellent ideas:

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Academic Support Challenge Ideas						
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Description of Idea</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>G</i>	<i>S</i>			
•	•				When administrating exams, obtain the correct forms and access codes to the databases.	

Academic Support Challenge Ideas						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Description of Idea	Comments
C	I	G	S			
•	•				Carefully schedule your time and effort with the instructor when monitoring work on daily assignments, tracking student grades, tests and overall progress.	
•					Visit the Alberta-North and eCampusAlberta Web sites to find available training resources.	
•					Learn to use and access the library database.	
•			•		Learn how you can help students with learning disabilities by navigating web sites, asking the student how you can help and what they need. Refer students to the institutional representatives that offer program supports and accommodations for learning challenges.	
•	•				Maintain a contact list from delivering institution in order to manage and coordinate the list of currently registered students.	
•			•		Encourage students of the value of filling out course evaluations for program review and improvements.	

CAP Coordinators are expected to train students on how to use computers, software, research skills, study skills, monitor students progress, counseling and advising skills. Many of these items could be included in a student orientation course that the student must enroll and successfully complete before registering in a course. As already suggested a simple online orientation course could relieve the coordinator's list of tasks and make the student more responsible for what they can do.

Chapter 6: Student Retention and Achievement

This chapter describes how to:

- Retain students.
- Coordinate ways to assist student.
- Face challenges in student retention and achievement.
- Implement successful practices for student retention and achievement.

Student Retention and Achievement

Given the challenge of finding available tutors able to teach basic skills in reading, writing and math, the most frequent way mentioned to achieve this was to get to know your community and build a contact list of people and their skills that are willing to tutor or teach. CAP Coordinators need to know who delivers various learning supports in their community.

Ways to retain student in their pursuit of achievement include:

- Get to know your community and who is willing to help with tutoring.
- Contact your local Literacy Coordinator – (Community Adult Learning Council).
- Organize information sessions, referrals and coaching.
- Recognize and assist or refer struggling students (see table below).
- Have procedures, counselors and mental health workers available to help students when struggles and challenges arise in their personal lives.

Facing Challenges in Student Retention and Achievement

Ways to face challenges in student retention and achievement include:

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Facing Challenges in Student Retention and Achievement						
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Description of Task</i>	<i>Comments</i>
C	I	G	S			
•	•	•	•		Investigate ways to address lack of consistent clear funding guidelines and processes.	

Facing Challenges in Student Retention and Achievement						
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Description of Task	Comments
C	I	G	S			
	•	•	•		Offer workshops for students to better prepare for program success; emphasize study skills, work life balance, living on a student budget and research skills.	
•	•				Learn how to access resources from other institutions.	
•	•			•	Search various institutions' web sites to find online support.	
•				•	Find programs, community support and talk to professionals to address the abuse of alcohol.	
•	•				Communicate between delivery institution and the student is critical to student success. As coordinators, we are here to provide assistance to facilitate the communicating any way possible.	

Successful Practices for Student Retention and Achievement

Best practices for student retention and achievement include:

- Be aware of community services to pass on to student.
- Organize community workshops, information sessions, guest speakers, writing, math and reading skill workshops.
- Contact and schedule counselors to meet with students.
- Refer students back to contact person at home college.
- Guide or refer students to tutors, web sites, and software helpers for the basics of reading, writing and math.
- Provide a venue for short courses covering topics such as time management and various life skills.
- Coordinate tutors to teach English skills and high school math (community volunteers, or IS Instructor/learning supports).
- Become comfortable using the Alberta-North web site so you can show students how to find reputable resources on important topics.
- Coordinate mini, online or on-site workshops offered by various counseling departments.
- Keep a contact list of people willing to tutor on a variety of topics.

- Have counselors and mental health workers (or a list of helpers in the community or region) available to help when students struggle in their personal lives.
- Know your boundaries as to how much personal assistance and motivating a coordinator can fairly offer.
- Provide integrated services; ESL, literacy, learning services and career services.
- Coordinate with the Career and Employment Centre and Community Learning Program who may be able to provide skill-based workshops for clients.
- Consider that all students, whether they are online or receiving face-to-face instruction should receive the same support. Work on online support like, *online Advisor* and *Ask Away* available in libraries.
- Become familiar with or refer students to orientation for web conferencing sessions to facilitate the support.
- Encouragement and modeling over a long period of time can counteract some established resistance to necessary workplace and learning routines.
- Distance delivering programming combined with strong support system will appeal to students who have the personal discipline required for distance delivery but also may attract those potential students who need a more structured delivery model (attendance at a facility, face-to-face or video conference delivery).

Chapter 7: Course Support

This chapter describes ways to:

- Provide course support.

Course support includes coordinating learning circles, space and equipment for student use. The following are suggested practices:

- Booking, reserving, arranging, borrowing, renting, scheduling space and equipment
- Registering clients
- Re-arranging and preparing classrooms
- Communicating emergency procedures
- Cleaning room before and after instruction
- Contacting and booking instructor
- Providing assistance with equipment operation
- Distributing certificates

The key to this area is booking space and equipment needs in advance of courses and programs to ensure both are available.

Chapter 8: Coordinating Employment Services

This chapter describes ways to:

- Recruit resources in your community for employment services.
- Start and offer employment services in your community.

Employment services provided by CAP Coordinators are varied, like their responsibilities and may include:

- Assistance with the preparation of resumes.
- Assistance with job interviews.
- Establish contact with local employment agency.
- Maintain job posting board.
- Conduct job searches.

Successful Employment Service Practices

The following successful practices recommended by coordinators include:

- Partner with First Nations and the local band council who often fund employment coordinator positions in your community.
- Maintain list of contacts for employment services.
- Maintain list of useful web sites.
- Know the resources in your community.
- Direct your clients to web sites, which conduct aptitude test to assist client in career decisions.
- Establish partnerships with local industry.
- Refer clients to local employment agencies.
- Setup up workshops covering the following topics: job skills, life skills, exam preparation, employment, courses and programs. For example, bring in community service providers.
- Make online courses available.
- Be aware of *Community Futures* and their services.
- Create a resume writing template and make it available for clients on the computer.
- Conduct mock interviews with students to give them practice and provide constructive feedback.
- Connect with the Government Employment Office and Apprenticeship Branch.

Chapter 9: Additional Educational Support Ideas

Here is a list of creative ideas to support learners pursuing education:

Note that in the table below the letters in the *Area of Responsibility* column stand for: C - CAP Coordinators, I - Institutions, G - Government (municipal, provincial, federal) and S - Students.

Additional Educational Support Ideas					
<i>Area of Responsibility</i>				<i>√ Check when complete</i>	<i>Support Ideas</i>
C	I	G	S		
•		•			Focus on services for First Nations and Métis including: Aboriginal cultural events, programming, education, elder consultation, community education committees and regular contact with band councils.
•	•				Offer evening classes that are affordable and delivered on site.
•	•				Provide tutors and instructors who work one on one with students whether in person or online.
•		•			Provide a network of support strategies to help the First Nation and Métis students be successful.
•	•				Offer courses to the students in their own communities and towns to prevent students fearing to need to relocate.
		•			Provide funding for students at home to cover childcare and an allowance so they can pay their bills.
•	•				Promote training and educational locally so that students connect directly to jobs.
•		•			Provide information on ESL (English as a Second Language) and ABE (Adult Basic Education) courses, employment services, and family and community support services.
•					Maintain a contact list of service agencies for referral services to students.
•					Connect students with other students in similar circumstances.

Additional Educational Support Ideas					
Area of Responsibility				√ Check when complete	Support Ideas
C	I	G	S		
•	•				Contact the staff of literary departments and library resources to find out what educational services are available for students.
•	•				Investigate various institutions that combine personal instruction with distance learning via an interactive video-conference system.
•					Organize learner supports including counseling, student mentors and tutors.
•					Recruit advisors who uphold cultural diversity.
	•				Work towards being a multi-lingual institution.
•	•				Design and deliver curriculum to support aboriginal learners and create assessments to enhance communities.
•					Provide a real person to work with and support individual learners. Choose someone who knows where to find answers and can provide answers to learner's questions.

References

Alberta-North. (2008). *Successful Practices for Supporting Distance Learners*. eCampusAlberta Research Project. <http://www.alberta-north.ca>