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LIMITLESS MIND:

EMPOWERING INNOVATION THROUGH VISUALIZATION

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PROGRAM
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ABSTRACTS BOOK

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REACHOUT EDU

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic leading to restricted movement control has seen the educational institutions quickly adopting the online-distance learning approach. Students and academicians must adopt the skills of conducting classes online. After a semester of noting the challenges that students came across with ODL and confirming the need from students' need-assessment survey, the counselling lecturers have come up with a method to help students in distress. Thus, the creation of the counselling blog is an initiative taken by the counselling lecturers to provide students with a venue to read about self-help tips and information about counselling. The blog has several headings that students can delve into if they want to search more on briefs about counselling, activities, websites, and contacts of professional helps. There is also a venue for chatting online with a lecturer on duty, and students can write in anonymously to share their life experiences. Early response from students showed encouraging and positive response where they applauded the attractive designs and contents of the blog. It is recommended that such step is taken by other educational institutions in the effort of assisting students at the faculty level before they are referred to professional help, if in need.

Keywords: counselling help, university students, blog

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational institutions around the globe were seriously affected during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Schools and universities were closed, and students were forced to learn from home. University students had to leave campus, go home and continue classes online. This sudden change had caused tremendous stress upon students who were taken off-guard to become independent learners, at the same time managing the home environment which certainly may not be conducive to many. Experts and survey on mental health have found worrying high percentage of increase in depression, anxiety and stress, causing insomnia, troubled thoughts and worrying [1]. The American College Health Association pointed out that even under normal situation; university students are plagued with psychological and academic distress, what more during the pandemic when they were forced to be away from peers and adopt online-distance learning approaches [2]. There is an urgent need to reach out and help students who experience stress during the remote learning period. Not seeing them on campus has made helping students with mental health issues challenging due to them not communicating to academic staff as well as inability for them to seek professional help from counsellors on campus. Therefore the counselling lecturers took an initiative to create a blog that can be a venue for students to get a sense of we-ness and obtain information relevant to their well-being.

2. OBJECTIVE

This paper reported the process that led to the creation of a counselling blog. Is there really a need for the blog, and what are the ratings students give to the newly created blog?

3. METHOD

The process that led to the creation of the blog used the general principles of action research. The problem determined were students having no venue to seek help from their faculty, making students felt alone and not coping well with the online learning situation. A short survey to determine the necessity to create the counselling blog was distributed to students. A quick interview with the Deputy of Dean (Academic Affairs) was also conducted. Next, the plan of action was performed to design the blog, with relevant materials compiled and suitable information chosen. The other steps of collecting data to seek initial response from students, analysis of data and future plan will be reported in the next section.

4. FINDINGS

Need analysis survey showed that 64 (49.2%) experienced moderate stress during the recent semester and 30 (23%) reported high stress. The highest source of stress was academic, followed by IT facilities, personal issues, financial, home, family and lastly peers. In terms of determining whether the blog is a needed platform, 112 (86%) said yes and 18 (14%) said maybe. Nobody answered no. In a short interview with the Deputy Dean of Academic Affairs, she applauded the initiative taken and confirmed that it was timely to create the blog to assist students with mental health issues especially when they are not on campus and have to cope with distance online learning.The blog was designed with attractive features and colorful headings, subheadings used. The main heading consisted of brief details about the facilitators, brief explanation about what counseling is about, tips and links to self-help websites, links to professional sites or numbers, and a column to submit a short story if they want to share their experiences.An initial survey to rate the newly created blog received positive responses from 22 students who visited it. Hundred percent said the blog is a good initiative and beneficial to students. Twenty-one students (95.5%) rated the subtopics as relevant; navigation bars are easy to use. Twenty students (90.9%) viewed the links to other websites and main topics as suitable, making them want to take actions. Nineteen (86.4%) said the blog is attractive and motivates them to find out more. Slightly lower ratings were given to graphic and color (81.8%) as well as main page and ability to motivate them to keep viewing the pages (77.3%).

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Admittedly there are still many more information and added features to be inserted in the blog as updating the blog is a continuous process. The step taken by counseling lecturers to create a blog was seen by many parties as a good and timely initiative, in view of providing students at home with access to information and tips when dealing with mental health issues. Learning from home is not necessarily a conducive environment for some students, especially those who faced internet facilities and family issues. Faculty members and professional helpers nearest to the students should look into the well-being of students who might face stress when doing online distance learning.

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Kelulusan daripada pihak YBhg. Profesor dalam perkara ini amat dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

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