Location: New York, NY
Focus Areas: Holistic

Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) serves over 24,000 students and is part of the City University of New York System. BMCC is a Hispanic Serving Institution and a Minority Serving Institution, and 70% of students come from households with incomes of $30,000 or less.

At A Glance:

» Leveraged existing technology and resources to address multiple dimensions of student wellness (financial, technology, mental health, and career development needs) in a virtual environment

» Developed centralized systems for students to apply for expanded emergency aid and technology offerings

Approach Overview

BMCC effectively leverages technology and resources to address multiple dimensions of student wellness, which includes addressing students' financial, technology, mental health, and career development needs.

Given the disproportionate economic and health impacts of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx students at BMCC, the college quickly responded by expanding emergency aid offerings and developing new virtual workshop programs about grief and loss. The college utilized Microsoft Forms for emergency aid applications to ensure any personal information shared was private and secure. The emergency aid platform allowed BMCC's trained social workers to develop a plan for wraparound services and loan laptops, internet hotspots, or other technologies when needed. BMCC also developed an in-house reservation system for students and their families to access packaged and hot meals from the college's food pantry.

In an effort to centralize communications for students, the college set flexible virtual office areas for when students could join a meeting room (camera on or off) to ask questions. The division of student affairs also streamlined processes to create a single email address to answer student questions. This reduced student confusion about who to contact, improved response times, and helped ensure a consistent understanding about the types of common questions being asked by students. To ensure resources were reaching all students, BMCC analyzed email engagement data to identify which students were not opening or replying to communications. The college then conducted a phone call campaign to reach out to students who were not responsive. Additionally, BMCC's library website now prominently displays invitations to connect with a librarian by chat, text or phone.

The Learning Resource Center has also developed virtual workshops for online student success, and it offers real-time tutoring sessions online. BMCC held its first ever Virtual Career Fair, where employers connected with students via live-chat, group video chat, or one-on-one video interviews on Zoom, WebEx, MS Teams and Google Meet. The college also developed specifically tailored virtual career service supports to help students find employment during this moment of financial hardship.

Having leadership who model the value of listening to students helps set a college-wide tone about the importance of connecting with students, as elaborated on in the quotes below:

" Where there is a chasm, we made sure to shrink that chasm to a gap, and then we tried to take the gap down to a little crack. When we couldn't change the chasm in student affairs, we tried to build a bridge to get over. "

" Most of what we have in place is an extension of the relationships we've had and built. Let the crisis be a learning experience. "

" While we can ask, 'How are you doing?' it's not good enough if you do not have a systemic response to how to help [students] handle the bad or sad news that they're providing. It's not good enough to just say, 'I'm sorry to hear that.' You ask what can you do, and be prepared to respond to them. "