

RIFT VALLEY UNIVERSITY



Hub of Excellence

Student Support and Service Guideline

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Acronyms

CODE: College of Open and Distance Education

HERQA: Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
RVU: Rift Valley University
TVET: Technical and Vocational Educational and Training

CHAPTER ONE

1. PREFACE TO RIFT VALLEY UNIVERSITY

1.1. Background of Rift Valley University

Rift Valley University initially conceived as College, was established in Adama City of East Shawa Zone, Oromia National Regional State in October 2000 G.C, foreseeing the core values of *good governance, commitment to quality services and community development, gender sensitivity, secularism and non-partisan, creativity, responsiveness, team work spirit, and work culture* parallel to the nation's development goals along with the purpose of producing competent, ethical and skilled manpower without making any distinction between people of different ethnic, religious, social, economic and political backgrounds.

After securing its legal personality, the then Rift Valley College strongly worked on the accreditation processes of its training and education programs from all regulatory bodies, and managed to get full accreditation from Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency and Regional States TVET Agencies. Taking its flourishing capacity and quality service into account, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with HERQA, granted the rank of University College in August 2007 G.C. This was not an easy task and a simple success story for the institution. The two regulatory bodies had conducted rigorous evaluation of the systems of the institution, physical facilities and learning resources of its campuses and faculties to come to decision of such status change. Afterwards, Rift Valley University College rigorously worked towards becoming a full-fledged university and realized itself as Rift Valley University in August 2014 G.C.

Currently, Rift Valley University being a pioneer and the largest Private Higher Learning Institution in Ethiopia has been delivering quality education to the citizens and foreigners who have lived in the country for different purposes. Furthermore, the University has 50 Campuses, 3 TVET Colleges and College of Open and Distance Education (32 accredited branches) with diversified fields of study across the country. Over the last two decades, thousands have joined and graduated with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Bachelor's

degree, and Master's degree that enabled them to support themselves and their families. Others have also managed to create their own jobs whereby they exhibited the merits of their training and education at Rift Valley University in fostering the already established development goals of the country.

1.2.Mission, Vision and Values of Rift Valley University

1.2.1. Mission

Rift Valley University exists to produce graduates who are competent, committed and ethical citizens; to engage in innovative and problem solving research; and to deliver sustainable community services.

1.2.2. Vision

RVU aspires to be one of the leading universities in teaching, research and community engagement in Africa and beyond by 2030.

Motto of RVU

“Hub of Excellence”

1.2.3. Values of RVU

The following are the values cherished by RVU:

1. Quality and Excellence
2. Responsiveness to customer needs
3. Good Governance
4. Professionalism and Academic Freedom
5. Team Spirit
6. Professional Integrity and Ethical Practices
7. Creativity and Innovativeness
8. Commitment to Community Services
9. Recognition of Diversity and Gender Sensitivity
10. Social Responsibility

CHAPTER TWO

2. INTRODUCTION OF THE GUIDELINE

2.1.Introduction

Students in Distance Education enjoy two quite different forms of support. These are the self-study materials produced and provided by the institution to help students to study on their own. The systems that students need to help them overcome problems that they encounter during the course of their studies. Although in designing self-study materials every attempt is made to respond to the varying needs of different types of students, it is inevitable that students will encounter problems that need individual help. They need different types of support at different times.

It is recognized among distance educators that well developed student support systems (like advising, counseling, etc.) are essential to the effective delivery of instruction at a distance. Students who are cut off from the normal support systems taken for granted by campus-based students frequently require an equally comprehensive network to help them succeed in their studies.

Student support services are designed to respond as much as possible to individual needs, and typically include the provision of support through tutors, counselors, advisers, and centre-based staff (academics, librarians, and so on). In broad terms tutors provide students with academic support, while counselors (or advisers) provide them with personal, or non-academic, forms of support. In practice the boundaries between tutoring and counseling are not clearly defined. Thus, you will find providing non-academic support at times simply because it falls naturally within the context of the problem that they are dealing with.

The range and type of services provided will vary from institution to institution.

Distance education programs although generally focus on the needs of students and on the technical, human and fiscal resources available to individual institutions the type of support they provide can vary.

2.2. Objectives of the Guideline

The objectives of this manual are to:-

- Provide implementers with knowledge and skill in delivering support services to the learners
- Put in place separate administrative arrangements for distance learners get effective and efficient service delivery
- Enable the implementers provide learners with precise, accurate and timely information about programs and regulations
- Enable the implementers identify and sort services like admission, registration, materials distribution, advising and counseling, library support and tutoring
- Provide the ground for the provision of quality and standardized services at all levels
- Enable the institution ascertain their students' needs
- Help implementers students overcome personal problems; develop new skills such as discussion and debate.
- Provide implementers opportunities to view issues pertinent to learners from different viewpoints

CHAPTER THREE

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTANCE LEARNERS

Unlike the traditional institution students, distance education students are a cross-section of the adult population. Due to various reasons several adults miss the opportunity of higher education when they were young, and forced to seek some employment. It is these adults who want to improve their knowledge while in service, because an institution certificate/ diploma/ degree will bring them both financial gain and personal satisfaction. Several surveys made on the strength of students of different distance education systems have shown that there are several segments of society who are keen to up-date their knowledge and seek higher education. Some such segments are:

- House wives,
- working women,
- Factory workers,
- Office technicians,
- Technicians,
- Disabled Persons,
- Prisoners
- Drop-outs etc.

Distance learners usually have the following characteristics:

- They are adult learners
- They have family and job responsibilities
- They join a program with a purpose
- They are from different age groups
- They come from both sexes
- They are both employed and unemployed
- They are married and unmarried
- They spend their own money to do a course / program
- They have less time for study.

Generally we find three categories of learners in distance learning system. The first category is that of learners who have confidence in their ability to work in their own. They are confident enough to think that they can succeed without any guidance from tutors and counselors.

The second categories of learners are the ones who actually need talking too. Having someone to help in solving their problems gives them clues about the system as well as builds a little more confidence in them. For them a face-to-face support system can make all the difference between withdrawing from the course and completing it.

The third categories of learners, who fall between the above two types, are the ones who are really sitting on the wall. If only they run in to intractable problems they approach the tutor and/or counselor for help.

Learners' behavior is influenced by a combination of the learner's needs plus the learner's situation and personal characteristics. Knowing these personal characteristics is an important aspect of planning distance learning courses and strategies. More importantly, knowing the learners can help drive program planning and policy formation, factors that are important to participation and success in distance learning. In considering student support services, any institution that offers courses through distance learning must address the question of who their learners are and what their needs are. The institution must then determine how those needs can be met with regard to constraints of costs, technologies, geography and etc.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. SUPPORT SERVICES

4.1. The Need and Concept of Support Services

Experience has shown that though self-instructional materials help a vast majority of learners to work through their chosen courses successfully, there is still a large number of learners who for one or the other reason find it difficult to get the best out of such materials. These learners require additional help to achieve what they want to. The ways and means of providing this additional help are called “support services”.

The main aim of student support within distance learning system is to retain students and to enable them make successful progress with their studies.

In the following discussion you will find different types of student support considered according to who provides the support: tutors, counselors or center-based staff. You will find different types of support discussed under the following headings.

1. Individual tutor support
2. Group-based tutor support
3. Counseling support
4. Center based support

There are essentially two types of student support, namely academic and non-academic, and this is typically provided by tutors and counselors, respectively. However, the division of responsibilities is not quite as clear-cut as this might suggest. For example, although tutors may concentrate on the provision of academic support - advising students when it is more appropriate to turn to their counselors for help – there will inevitably be times when they find themselves giving non-academic advice, simply because this emerges naturally from the context being discussed and can be addressed immediately. Nor are tutors and counselors the only ones to provide student support, and, as you will see in the text that follows, some forms of student support may be provided by centre-based staff.

4.1.1. Individual Tutor Support

The majorities of tutors tend to have other full-time jobs - often as teachers or trainers and are not available on full-time basis. They are typically paid on a contract basis that takes into account the number of tutorials to be provided.

The institution chooses tutors with the desired qualities.

In the text that follows you will find comments on two forms of individualized tutor support:

- ✓ The first is the type of *ad hoc support* offered in response to student queries, whatever these may be and whenever they might arise, and
- ✓ The second is the type of *more regular support* offered to students in the form of feedback on assignments and quizzes.

Ad hoc support

The tutor may provide individualized support in a number of ways, typically making use of the telephone, telegram, e-mail and face-to-face meetings for contact purposes. Whatever medium is used for contact purposes, tutors should inform students at the beginning of their courses as to when they can normally be contacted and by what means. They should also advise their students of the extent to which they are likely to be able to respond individual queries and the time that it will usually take to respond. Knowing that a tutor is available and willing to help can make a considerable difference particularly to students at risk of dropping out.

Regular support

One of the most important forms of communication between tutor and student centers around the regular assignments and quiz that students typically submit to their tutors during their tutorial. Apart from being used for grading purposes, tutor-marked quizzes help tutors to identify problems being encountered and give them the opportunity to provide students with advice on what they might do to overcome such problems.

4.1.2. Group-Based Tutor Support

Tutorials are traditionally the most common way of providing students with support on a group basis.

Course tutors are the closest for Distance education student. *Tutor- learner contact* is an essential part of a good educational environment. These occasions are not only good for motivating learners but also helpful in the context of overcoming learning problems. Learners are also able to use these occasions to measure their own value systems about their studies and their future. Thus, tutors have to be carefully selected, trained and monitored in terms of their performance. Most of them are part-timers with other professional and social obligations. This responsibility has to be taken into account when allocating work and demanding performance from them. If inducted properly, trained and supported well, they are great assets to the institution. Failure to do so causes untold misery to learners and brings disrespect to the institution.

The following are some of the purposes for which they might be used.

To respond to problems being experienced by students as a whole

These may be identified through general discussion of problems within the group. Where problems are identified, the tutor may provide clarification of the issues, identify resources to which students might turn for further reinforcement, and provide students with the opportunity to test out their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

To facilitate project work

Where students are:

Undertaking projects they may need advice on such matters as:

- the choice of suitable topics,
- the nature of the projects to be undertaken,
- the identification of relevant resources,
- the type of literature searches that may be required,
- the collection of data, modes of analysis, and the writing of reports, these all may be useful items for clarification and discussion at tutorials.

- To introduce students in broad terms to the course content – particularly at the beginning of a course

At such points in time students may need guidance on:-

- what is expected of them,
- the schedules that they will need to keep to,
- the assignments they will be expected to submit,
- the resources they will require, and
- the forms of support that they might expect to be available.

To help illuminate issues through group discussion

To this end, face-to-face tutoring of lessons is the most commonly provided support services in most Distance Education Institutions. These programs help in orienting and guiding the learners. They provide condensed classroom teaching to cover important and difficult topics prescribed in the courses.

Generally, these programs are organized at study centers as per a predetermined schedule communicated by the Student Support Services at campuses and study centers.

4.1.3. Counseling Support

Whereas a great deal of tutor support can be provided at a distance, counseling usually needs to be undertaken face- to- face, particularly where emotional issues need to be discussed. In common with tutors, counselors need to be open, friendly and approachable. They also need to be good listeners, able to help students clarify issues for themselves, able to point out the options available to them, and to identify the consequences of adopting any particular option. As with tutors, the duties of counselors need to be identified as clearly as possible, and the following are simply examples of tasks that they might be asked to undertake.

These are to:-

- Advise students enrolling on courses about related requirements.
- Help students in choosing courses and programs of study.
- Advise students on problems affecting their studies.

- Advise on financial issues.

Apart from these activities, counseling facilities for dealing with various kinds of student problems, at three stages given below:

- ❖ Helping a student in making an appropriate educational choice. (Pre-registration counseling)
- ❖ Giving the necessary backup support for meeting the intellectual challenges made upon him/her after registration and counseling him/her in case of any midstream changes required.
- ❖ Suggesting to him/her suitable educational or vocational openings after completion of a certain course or program

4.1.4. Centre-Based Support

On Line and Distance Education Institution provides a number of support services on a centralized basis such as library services, tutorial, guidance, counseling and other services.

These resource centers when established may have the following major functions:

Provision of physical facilities:

It requires various types of Hardware and Software facilities to be provided like, Audio-visual equipment's, Rooms for tutorials and, Library containing reference books, etc.

Academic support functions:

Such functions will have mainly counseling to the learners, managing tutorial sessions for them as per the need of the users.

Administrative functions:

Since these centers are the agents between the society and the institution, they would have a task of developing public relations for better human relations with the society around the centre.

Organizing for the examinations and evaluation work of the assignments and answer scripts of the learners has to be done at these centers.

Miscellaneous functions

It has local presence of the institution and establishing an image of the Rift Valley University in the society. It may help in organization long term contact programs outside the center. These programs may be for developing awareness about the institution in the mass and taking the learners to the actual field of work for developing the mastery in the work.

Apart from above functions, there may be many other functions like social involvement in some welfare activities of the area, developing awareness about recent developments, if any, from time to time.

Local Support Systems for Learners

The level of support such a system provides for its clients often reflects the commitment of a distance teaching institution to its clients. This refers decentralizing the student support services system of the institution. However, this should consider the number and distribution of the students and cost of establishing local support. Local support systems for learners could be at campus or at more decentralized level (Study Centers).

4.2.Campus as Wing of CODE

Campus is a center established or maintained by the Institution for the purpose of coordinating and supervising the work of Study Centers in any region and for performing such other functions as may be conferred on such centers by the Institution Management.

Broadly, a Campus office is the sub-office of the institution in a defined region/state with responsibility to coordinate and supervise the institution's operations, particularly the Study Centers in the allotted region. However, its functions will grow with the expansion of the activities and programs of the institution.

Functions

- ❖ Organization of tutorial sessions as per the institution's policies.
- ❖ Training of staff of the study centers
- ❖ Design appropriate and feasible administrative and academic systems at campus level and at center level as well.
- ❖ Giving orientation to counselors
- ❖ Equipping the centers with the necessary facilities
- ❖ Supervision and coordination of the work at the Study Centers, negotiations with local Governments, local schools and institutions of higher learning with a view to develop local facilities for the institution programs;
- ❖ To ensure a spirit of goodwill among students as well as staff,
- ❖ To promote public awareness in the region of the institution and its role, and goodwill towards the institution among the officers and staff of institutions
- ❖ To encourage students to apply for admission to the institution; to encourage and promote positive and helpful attitudes towards the institution 's students on the part of employers and local authorities;
- ❖ To exercise necessary control on full-time and part-time staff and students in accordance with the provisions of the institution's rules.
- ❖ Organizing the campus library
- ❖ Promotion activities
- ❖ Collaboration and communication.
 - Creating collaboration, partnership and communication with local institutions in order to identify training needs of the community as well as evaluate the quality of distance education program
- ❖ Meeting with heads of institution, coordinators, academic counselors, students, campuses education departments, capacity building offices.
- ❖ Manage the maintenance of records
 - Service records
 - Students records
 - Equipment utilization records
 - Records pertaining to tutors and counselors

- Data concerning study centers
- Data concerning distribution of modules, educational media programs
- Staff records
- Monitoring and evaluation data
- Compliant records

❖ **Feedback and Reporting**

- Report to CODE on the activities of the campus/center including tutoring, counseling academic performance, student grievances, suggestions on the evaluation and dissemination of assignments and examinations, results quality of instructional materials, communication, quality of support services
- Dissemination of reports of the CODE to Campuses and study centers on monitoring and evaluation results, seminars and workshops, experiences of other national, international distance education and organizations, policy issue, rules and regulations

4.3.Campus Student Support Service

A Campus Coordinator is in-charge of the institution’s activities within the campuses and responsible to the Campus Services and Tutorial Support Division. His/her principal responsibilities within the campus and study centers are to direct, in accordance with established policies and procedures.

4.4. Facilities at Campus Level

The campus may have a library; course material developed by the institution, reference books, audio and video tapes, computers etc. It is intended to act as a resource center of the institution in a particular campus. A Campus will be a center for training of coordinators/ counselors/ tutors and would provide a venue for expressing student-response or tutor-response with reference to a particular subject.

4.5.Tutorial at Campuses and Study Centers

In most distance education institutions there is no much direct interaction between the teacher and the learner. However, the Study Centers to a large extent overcome the barrier of face-to-face interaction. They are the life nerves of a distance education system. Study Centers provide sufficient accommodation and class rooms for tutorials. The Study Center is mostly headed by a Coordinator. Tutorial is done mostly by senior teachers from academic institutions usually on Saturdays and Sundays to facilitate the distance education students of the Institution. The study centers should be established in strategic locations. The criteria for selection of the centers (Campus or study centers) could be:

- Accessibility of the center
- The number of students it can serve
- Suitable to integrate the off campus program with the conventional program of the institution
- Availability of basic infrastructure and facilities (electricity, classroom, Bank, telephone etc.)
- Of the location of the center
- Availability of potential tutors

Functions and Activities

Campuses and Study centers have the following major functions:

- Academic counseling
- Information services
- Orientation program
- Library services
- Assignment handling
- Conducting examination

Responsibilities of the Campuses and study center coordinators

- Arrange space (classroom) for tutorials

- Oversee and supervise the tutoring system
- Coordinate and manage all distance education activities of the center
- Oversee administration of tests and marking of projects and assignment
- Collect assignments, Quizzes and projects and submit to CODE.
- Make available to students learning resource materials and equipment
- Attend students' concern and problems in the first instance
- Monitor and keep records students' and tutors' attendance
- Liaise with the campus and CODE personnel
- Provide information to clients interested in the institution's programs and courses
- Make payments for tutors for the services they render and submit the accounting documents to the campus.
- Undertake any other duties related to the operational activities of the center.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. THE MAIN MANAGERIAL TASKS OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

5.1. Recruiting and Selecting Tutors

The main managerial task of the students support service is to select and recruit the tutor as per the tutorial provision guideline.

Tutors role includes the following:

- Plan and facilitate face- to- face tutorial to learners
- Assess tutor marked quizzes.
- Provide individualize counseling support
- Help learners through course materials and monitor student progress
- Advice students on time management, study skills and preparation for exams.
- Report TMQ results to campus and study centers within the set time frame.
- Participate (provide comments) in course revision

Forming self-help study groups (Peer group support)

Needless to say, tutors cannot always be available on demand, and there are times when fellow students may be able to obtain more immediate help from their fellow students. In fact, students sometimes find it easier to talk to their colleagues about problems - not wanting to look stupid in front of a tutor who will ultimately be assessing their performance.

Thus, peer support in learning is highly beneficial for distance education program. It is a means of sharing one's own ideas and responding to the ideas of others to improve thinking and increasing understanding. Learning can be improved by a team effort rather than a collection of solo performances. Study centre facilities provide valuable opportunities for peer supported learning.

Thus, setting up peer groups provides students with an easily accessible additional form of local support, and at the first tutorial on a course tutors typically to encourage students who live near each other to form local peer groups, providing one another with a means of mutual support.

When organizing self-help groups the students should answer the following important questions.

- i. Why would you want to join a self-help group? It is to :
 - Keep in touch between tutorials;
 - Study with others;
 - Discuss ideas with other students;
 - Provide mutual support;
 - Meet at a time and place to suit your circumstances if you cannot attend tutorials.
- ii. What contact is possible?
 - Meet face- to- face
 - Telephone, mail or what
- iii. When can members of the group meet face- to- face?
 - Choose somewhere neutral first
 - Choose a place where you are happy about personal safety, accessibility (transportation)
 - Not everywhere will be comfortable, going to somewhere like a hotel that could be noisy.
 - If someone offers his/her home after the first meeting, it is wise to check out conducive for group work and discussion.
- iv. How do you join?
 - Ask other students getting together when you meet at tutorials
 - You can ask other students if they want to form a self help group at the first tutorials
- v. How does a group get started?
 - A volunteer takes responsibility for arranging the first meeting or contact
 - At the end of the first meeting, the group decides when to meet next
 - It can work with any number (two and above students)

- Your tutor might be willing to suggest topics for the group discussion
- vi. What makes a group successful?
- Agree beforehand what topic you will cover at first and subsequent meetings
 - Agree a structure for the activities
 - Do any preparation you have decided on
- vii. How do you keep the group going?
- Always confirm the time, place and topic for your next meeting
 - Confirm who will make necessary arrangements, perhaps taking it in turns
 - Exchange contact details so that you can keep in touch
- viii. What kinds of activities work?

As well as informal discussions you can try more structured work. For example, decide on a topic or question, then make notes individually, compare notes in pairs report back to the rest of the group. You can also take a statement from the course material and then ask other students if they agree or disagree and justify their stand. You can also discuss on the next assignment; the meaning of the questions, the background, possible approaches to answering. Here you need to make sure the submitted assignment is your own work.

CHAPTER SIX

6. SELECTING AND USING MEDIA

The word media is from the Latin word for middle and describes that which stands between the receiver and the source of the message. It is commonly used to describe ways to convey information. Distance education uses various media to deliver learning information and to link students and teachers. Some media can be used for both purposes.

6.1. Media Components Can Provide

- subject information and the instructional process
- sound and vision to explain or demonstrate skills
- self-testing opportunities and assessment processes
- communication between teachers and students

There are a large number of technologies available for the delivery of distance education course. Selecting the medium is an important part of the efficiency of that course. Each medium has its own strengths and weaknesses, and these should be matched to the nature of the learning setting. The medium selection process should be undertaken for each course and each program, since they all have different requirements depending on the objectives, learners, and learning environment. The golden rule is that the message a teacher wishes to convey is considerably more important than the means used to convey it. In the world of education and training, technology is a servant and not a master; the media isn't the message, only the means.

To this end, in setting up distance education and select the appropriate media and technology you need.

- Determine your primary delivery approach (print or hybrid);
- When considering using media in training delivery, always ask WHY?
- Review the course outline to determine where media can be used to facilitate learning;

- Ascertain availability of student access to the media selected; the students who will use the training program is a vital consideration
- Locate appropriate resources to fit your objectives or plan to create them.
- Instructional effectiveness should always be measured against cost and time: is the resource development effort really going to be worth it?
- Be sure to consider alternative media that may be less expensive, yet potentially as effective as more expensive media. For example, print, audio and video recordings, telegram and the telephone should be considered in the selection process.

The challenge is to select and provide appropriate media that will accomplish learning objectives in the most cost-effective manner. Remember, there are often less expensive alternatives that will accomplish the same objectives.

6.2. Print Medium

Print resources are relatively cheap to produce, and convey theory and knowledge very effectively with instructional techniques which help students to learn then test their own understanding. Many processes can be demonstrated, but physical operations or interactions are much less successful in the print medium. Most distance education courses are delivered via print resources, often supported by other media components.

Most of the time, print materials form a significant part of the delivery method. Other media components can offer supplementary information in a different format, or provide different learning experiences for students which help them learn skills more effectively. Print materials often cite references to audio and video resources, which can be sent out to students from a resource center on temporary loan.

Therefore, the value and effectiveness of print resources should not be minimized. In spite of the explosion of high tech computer-based communication and of the information super-highway, print will remain the most accessible medium of communication for many years to come. It can be used anywhere, and is always at hand for reference. However, print materials must be designed and written to be superior to a textbook or a manual.