

This online career center maximizes its efficiency using OptimalResume

Walden University is an online university with 52,000 students. Its Career Services Center with a full-time staff of five professionals is a model for efficiency. The Career Services team's mission is to support both students and alumni in proactively managing their careers, i.e., "to teach them to fish so they can fish for a lifetime." As Lisa Cook, Senior Director of Career Services, said, "We never turn students or alumni away. You could come back to us ten years later and we would provide you with strategies and resources to position yourself for your next opportunity."

How is it possible to effectively offer services to a population of 52,000 students with a staff of only five? How did the Career Services team reach more than 117,000 touch points with student and alumni use of their services and resources last year?

Online touches and collaboration

At the core of the program, the Career Services Center engages faculty in various aspects of career services from creating content to full classroom integration. Faculty members, who support the career success of their students, collaborate with the Career Services team to develop and present webinars and employment-related marketing materials such as sample resumes, CVs, and electronic portfolios tailored to their academic programs.

As Lisa said, "One of the issues with an online university is social isolation. Therefore, we offer live online networking events to connect students and alumni via IM chats. Our learners are clamoring for ways to connect. Our university's mission is positive social change, so we're planning live online networking events to connect our faculty, staff, students, and alumni all over the world based on their specific interests in positive social change. Our learners' social change efforts span multiple academic programs. We're very excited to engage our Walden community this way."

Self-directed online career tools

The Career Services Center takes full advantage of the Optimal Resume Career & Talent Suite, which includes top-rated career tools such as the resume builder, cover letter builder, interview preparation program, the electronic portfolio module, and personal website builder. Nicolle Skalski, Senior Career Services Advisor, manages Walden's OptimalResume system and has tailored many tutorials and sample documents to meet student needs. She has seen more than 11,000 students and alumni create OptimalResume accounts since the Career Services Center launched the system in 2012.

Students and alumni use the system to create critical career documents in a self-paced manner using examples and guidance developed by the Career Services staff and faculty. Nicolle states, "With these tools, we do not need to instruct our learners about details like which font or format to use. Instead, we focus on the bigger picture such as how to tailor their qualifications in their resumes and CV's to meet an employer's needs and how to create and present their online portfolios. These important skills will help them succeed in the long run."

Skills Café webinars, video tutorials, and slideshows

The Career Services Center's collection of archived webinars is extensive. Skills Cafés are informal webinars to help tackle frequently asked questions about job search and career management topics. They cover general strategies from networking to building one's professional brand. The Career Services team also delivers more formal, topical webinars featuring faculty and alumni presenters. Whether a learner is pursuing a career in HR, project management, criminal justice or healthcare informatics, there

are recorded webinars featuring stories, strategies, and resources. Additionally, the Center's Doctoral Webinar Series and webinars on "Developing Social Entrepreneurs," "The Building Blocks of Starting a Nonprofit Organization," and "Advancing Your Career through Strategic Volunteering" are very popular.

Lisa said, "The use of webinars and videos are keys to our success. We invite faculty members and alumni to serve as guest speakers and we aim to be creative and interactive. The advantages of live webinars are engaging in live audience interaction and directing our attendees' questions to our presenters."

Always something new

The Walden University Career Services Center is doing a lot of great things. "We're always looking for innovative and unique solutions to help people connect and succeed." They roll out the red carpet for everyone, have a ton of success stories to tell, promote positive social change, and build student and alumni communities.