Increasing Faculty Satisfaction and Student Access to Online Education via Dedicated Technical Support Specialists

Johanna Creswell Báez, Matthea Marquart, Rebecca Y. Chung, Kristin Garay, and Delia Ryan

Abstract: High-quality technical support for synchronous social work classes is imperative to support technological preparedness and overcome technological challenges for instructors and students. Columbia University School of Social Work’s Online Campus uses a primarily synchronous model for our online MSW program, with each course supported by a dedicated technical support specialist, called a Live Support Specialist (LSS). This role provides a vital contribution to the quality of our online courses, and substantially increases faculty satisfaction and student access.

Acknowledgements: Columbia University’s School of Social Work, Steven Schinke, Julien Teitler, Gerard Bueno, Donna Francis, Noemi Abreu, Brittany McKeldin, & Kathryn Viola

And, a special thanks to our amazing Live Support Specialist team.


Dedicated Technical Support Social Worker on Every Instructional Team and Only Top-3 School of Social Work with a Fully Online MSW Program

The Challenge
As many seasoned or novice online social work instructors have discovered, technology is not always predictable and technological disruptions or challenges are inevitable (Pardasani, Goldkind, Heyman, & Cross-Denny, 2012; Hitchcock, Sage, & Smyth, 2019).

LSS Contributions
- Enable instructor to focus on teaching by handling all technical setup and issues
- Provide students & instructional team with empathetic support from an alumni perspective, using social work skills

LSS Logistics
- Work 5 hours/week/course, plus 10 hours prior to the start of the semester to prep with the instructional team
- Position is a variable hours officer position, with a maximum of 20 hours/week
- Paid an hourly rate with submission of timesheet
- Provided potential opportunities for additional projects, such as working on quality assurance of online courses

Instructor Feedback About Live Support Specialists

Source: Survey of Full 2018 online instructors (38 responses)
Scale of 1:10

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