

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Education has always played an important role in human life and it has been conducted in various ways depending on the culture and location. During the past centuries men have traveled from country to country for business, migration, war and education. Desire to avoid traditional education was always tremendous and invention of Internet brought this idea closer to reality (Marsap and Narin, 2009).

Internet interconnects the computer networks and enables them to communicate directly with each other throughout the world. This global interconnection of governments, education and businesses led to computer networks becoming more accessible to the public to provide quality information, education and entertainment for humanity. In early 1995, the Internet interconnected more than 2 million hosts and nearly 25 million users worldwide and it kept growing. (Hefley and Morris, 1995), Internet revolutionized the world of education. Nowadays in a network world it is possible to add “e” to almost anything e.g. e-mail, e-commerce, e-business, e-procurement, e-tailing, e-government, e-learning. In education the existence of internet and World Wide Web are changing the instructions, researches, administrations, and public services (Katz and Oblinger, 2000). Internet is today’s advanced technologies in the field of computers. Electronic file transfer, telecommunication and wireless networking are transferring the world from traditional learning into the new world of electronic learning or e-learning. According to Winstion et al (2001), in any higher institution the student affairs is used to describe the organizational structure or unit within an institution responsible for students’ out-of-class life and learning. Student

affairs department have many divisions that provide services to students. Advanced technologies such as World Wide Web, email, chat, voice or IP and more have also facilitated the student affairs, administration and services. Today's many institutions have placed a variety of student affairs services on-line (example, financial aid registration, admission, and career services). Online services allowed students to be served ' better, quicker, easier, cheaper, and at times and places more convenient for students'' (Winstion et al, 2001). Although many services and facilities provided by the student affairs both in traditional and electronic learning (e-learning) are professionally similar, but yet e-learning programs face with more uncertain and confused issues. This may happen due to lack of face to face communication between the students and the staffs of student affairs department. This research emphasizes on online student affairs administration for e-learning students and can be also used to facilitate student affairs administration in traditional learning system.

1.1.1 E-Learning Definition

In many documents, e-learning refers to an online learning program built on a technology infrastructure. Online learning refers to the use of computer for purpose of learning via web or internet technologies. Some other definitions of e-learning are as follow:

E-learning is a form of open learning. It covers wide range of technology and learning method, including both formal (eg. online courses,) and informal (eg. serving the internet) learning. (NG Poh Yen, 2004)

According Carol Fallon and Sharon Brown the authors of e-learning standard books, e-learning is defined as any learning and training that is

facilitated by the use of well-known and proven computer technologies, specific networks based on internet technology (Fallon and Brown, 2003).

In the article of “Is E-learning Really the Future or a Risk?”, written by Gray (2001) defined e-learning as the delivery of teaching materials electronically with the added value of maintaining standards and quality across the board without the limitation of locations. E-Learning is mostly used by corporations, government agencies, educational institutions, and training centers. More or less e-learning refers to the type of learning that uses electronic devices (ex, CD, DVD, Videotape and etc) and the Internet to deliver learning materials and lectures. In the education market E-Learning helps college and university students to reach their goals without attending classes. Students can learn anywhere and at any time despite the distance and location. Students can refer to the Learning material though using of video tapes and CDs or via the web, online learning. It also benefits the colleges and universities to have students from all over the world meaning more students and more marketing.

1.1.2 What is Student Affairs Department?

A simple look at any college and universities shows that Student affairs refers to an organizational division within colleges and universities that provide facilities and services focused on students needs such as financial aid, career development, counseling, academic advisory , students activities, student’s health. There are some terms that refer to the head of the institution’s student affairs unit on a campus as vice president of student affairs, chief student affairs officer, chief student affairs administrator, and senior student affairs administrator (Winstion et al, 2001).

According to Blimling and Whitt (1999) in 1996, two national organizations, National Association of Student Affairs Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and American College Personnel Association (ACPA) sponsored the development of good principles practice of student affairs. The Principles for Good Practice for student affairs are as below:

- 1) Engages students in active learning
- 2) Helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards.
- 3) Sets and communicates high expectations for student learning.
- 4) Uses systematic inquiry to improve students and institutional performances.
- 5) Uses resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.
- 6) Forges educational partnerships that advances student learning.
- 7) Builds supportive and inclusive communities.

This research will focus on 4th and 5th principles of Good Practice for student affairs and uses IT recourses (web technology) to improve the student services and student affairs performance in e-learning environment.

1.2 Problem Statement

Most of the universities all over the world have been focused in developing e-learning environment that facilitate e-learning for students in term of their study, advanced technologies have been used to develop e-learning tools and environment (Selim, 2007). Universities in Malaysia are adopting e-learning system for educating undergraduate and postgraduate students, however they more concerned putting course material and assignment online to address some real issues that students face transferring from traditional learning environment to e-learning environment. In universities one of the departments that is involved with students' academic and social problems is student affairs department. In traditional learning environments students

need to go to universities and attend lectures; they spend most of their times in universities compare to e-learning where students rarely go to universities. Face to face communications are mostly practiced by traditional learning students to communicate with student affairs professional advisors. The issue here is when simple question or problem arises, is face to face communication will be suitable for e-learning students or they need to be provided with advanced online facilities to solve their issues (Marsap and Narin, 2009).

Since today's student affairs professional advisors are dealing with both on-campus, traditional learning, and off-campus, e-learning, students then there are several crucial questions that require assessment. Some, but not all, pertinent questions include the following:

- How can student affairs department, bridge the gap between their own services in traditional learning and e-learning environment?
- What traditional services and what new services should be improve for e-learning students?
- Which student affairs department services, need to be redefined and focused to address the needs of students in e-learning environment?
- How can the student affairs department becomes a viable and productive source to improve the current situation of e-learning and online programs?

Therefore this study aims to find the main influential factors in regard to students' expectations from the student affairs department by addressing the questions above. From these discussions the problems surrounding e-learning students can be summed up to:

- There are still some chances that the student affairs department can not meet the students' needs and expectations.

- Lack of accurate management online service system from the student affairs department can lead to misunderstanding due to insufficient information.

1.2.1 Motivation

From few years ago Malaysians and private universities are trying to conduct more courses online. In December 2002 former Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad proposed to make Malaysia a regional education center in Asia. In the Eight Malaysian Plan the education sector was given an important role of developing a pool of knowledge worker who are productive, innovative, trainable and knowledgeable. (Poh Yen, 2004)

Malaysia is trying to be an educational hub in Asia and one of the area that is developing in Malaysian universities is e-learning courses. Some of the universities such as UNITAR, Multimedia, and Open University are more ahead in e-learning business while public universities such as UM, UPM, UKM have started e-learning courses recently.

The public universities in Malaysia are more into traditional learning but e-learning is still part of their education system. E-learning students in these universities are more to distance learning thus they travel to campus rarely. These students need special cares and more motivational help due to lack of face to face interaction compared to traditional learners. Nowadays the student affairs professionals in these universities are dealing with two types of students therefore one of the interesting areas that should be modified to provide appropriate student affairs services for their new type of students, e-learning students.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Nowadays many colleges and universities in Malaysia are using e-learning as a new approach to provide education for students, and it is progressing in the area of education. Student affairs department of most public and private universities in Malaysia are using web pages and internet technologies to provide online services to students involved in traditional learning and e-learning. Although e-learning and traditional learning students have many common needs and requirements, e-learning students are more involved in distance learning or they come to college and university rarely so they need more attention due to lack of face to face interaction with student affairs professionals in case of their needs. Therefore there is a need to access to an easy, complete and quick online program for students in order to communicate with their lecturers, course mates and students affair department. This research investigates how student affairs administration responds to students' requires and how students find this system efficient and suitable.

Understanding learners' attitudes and perceptions toward provided services from student affairs department for e-learning is a critical issue for improving e-learning usage and effects. The overall objective of this study is to specify and evaluate the student affairs services of students, e-learning and traditional learning. The study aims at evaluating the current student affairs system and specifying the practical system to facilitate e-learning students.

The objectives of research are as follows:

1. To explore the attitude and the level of satisfaction towards student affairs department among e-learning and traditional students.

2. To evaluate the facilities and services (especially related to online services) provided by student affairs administration in public and private universities in Malaysia.
3. To determine the effectiveness of the online services provided by student affairs department especially the weakness and strong points since e-learning students are not able to interact face to face
4. To evaluate the similarities and differences of services provided by students affairs administration for traditional learning and e-learning students.
5. To develop an appropriate system prototype for student affairs administration that suits e-learning students and provide better services for e-learning students. A simple user interface will be developed for interacting with student affairs professionals to improve student affairs administration services for e-learning students.

This research focuses on the proper services provided by the student affairs department. The similarities and differences of services for traditional and e-learning students will be considered in this research to find the better and proper services for e-learning students.

The potentials of the research outcomes are as follows:

1. The survey results will show the status of student affairs administration in few of the public and private universities in Malaysia. The results of survey will indicate the correct direction of research work.
2. The survey results will indicate the proper services for e-learning students without their physical appearances in colleges and universities.
3. The analysis of the survey results indicate the similarities and differences of the services provided by student affairs department for both e-learning and traditional learning students.

4. Development of suitable and appropriate prototype for student affairs administration to facilitate e-learning students.

1.4 Scope of Research

E-learning courses are growing fast in Malaysian public and private universities. A simple look at public universities indicates that they are more in traditional learning rather than e-learning business, and e-learning courses cover only portion of courses that is offered by these universities in some faculties.

Since Malaysian universities practice traditional learning more therefore the staffs from student affairs are more familiar with the issues and needs of traditional learners. In these universities many services provided by student affairs department are also designed to provide facilities and services to traditional learners. Looking at E-learning students indicates that these students are rarely needed to be present in classes, and they are more interested in distance learning therefore the type of services provided by student affairs may vary for e-learning students. The main objective of this research is to develop student affairs administration system to provide services that are suitable for e-learning students. This system also should gather information to help vice president of student affairs in decision making relating e-learning student's needs and issues.

The aspects of this research include the following:

- 1) To survey the existing services offered by student affairs department in major Malaysian universities such as UM, UKM, UPM, UTM, USM, UNITAR, OUM and MMU.
- 2) To evaluate and analyze the existing services offered by students affairs departments for E-learning students in major universities that offer e-learning courses.

- 3) To find out the proper type of services to facilitate e-learning students.
- 4) To discuss the results of evaluation and problem elicitation to gather requirements for the designing of student affairs administration for e-learning students.
- 5) To develop a web based prototype based on the requirements gathered from the information evaluation to provide better services for e-learning students and enable vice presidents of student affairs make better decision and monitor e-learning student's needs and issues.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This dissertation consists of six chapters; the brief descriptions of each chapter are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter contains an introduction, brief description, overall scope and objectives used in this project.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Covers the literature reviews on student affairs administration, issues, models, traditional and e-learning system

Chapter 3: Methodology

Covers the methodology that has been used in this research in order to collect and analyze the data.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussions

Explains the requirement analysis (Descriptive Analysis) and designs a new system which includes functionality testing and coding.

Chapter 5: System Implementation and Manual

This session includes system implementation process, documentation, and user manual.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter includes the conclusion and suggestions for any possible improvement on the new system in the future.