

# Effective Practices in Using Coaches in Large Online Courses

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# Objectives

Upon completion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

- define 'academic coaches' as it relates to UTRGV
- describe methodology and analysis employed to identify best practices on effective utilization of academic coaches
- discuss findings on academic coach practices employed by faculty
- discuss lessons learned and next steps for study



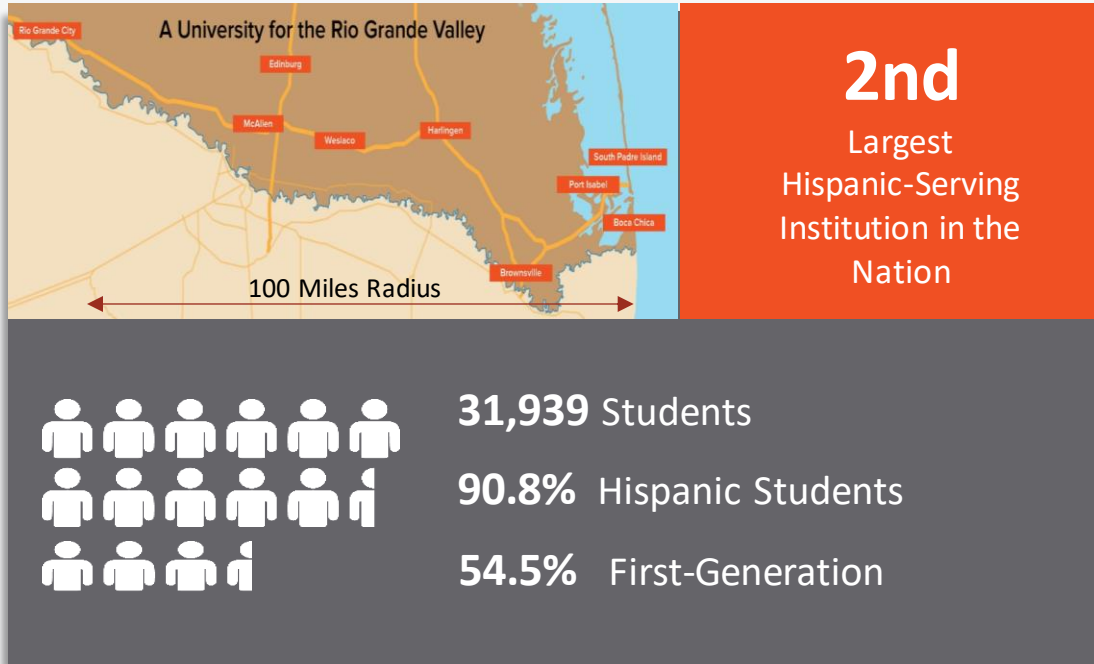
INSTRUCTIONAL  
CONNECTIONS

# Acknowledgment

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- **Instructional Connections (IC)**
- **Small Research Grant Program**

# About UTRGV



## Online Stats Fall 2021

- **1,951** Online course sections offered
- **16,531** students taking at least 1 online course
  - **51%** of students taking at least 1 online course
- **183,090** SCH

# What is an Academic Coach?

- Subject Matter Experts
- Minimum Master's Degree
- Employed by Instructional Connections
- Assist faculty at course level
- Provide student support
- For UTRGV
  - Large Online Courses
  - Accelerated Courses



- What is a Large Online
- Course @ UTRGV?

- For Undergraduate Courses
  - 60+ actual enrollment
  - Minimum capsize set to 75
- For Graduate Courses
  - 45+actual enrollment
- Qualifications to utilize a coach
  - Meet Above size requirements
  - Complete Quality Matters and Teaching Large Online Workshop/Blueprinting







Background

**UTRGV**<sup>TM</sup>

# Purpose

- Limited research on how faculty deploy academic coaches as critical instructional support team members
- Scholarly attention to best practices related to utilizing the team approach for instructional support



# Research Aims

Examine the attributes, behaviors, preferences, feelings, attitudes, opinions, and knowledge of faculty who use academic coaches for instructional support within the online course.



# Intended Outcome

- Inform best practice guidelines for faculty new to the use of academic coaches
- Provide the foundation for future development of a valid and reliable instrument for evaluation of the application and use of academic coaches in online courses

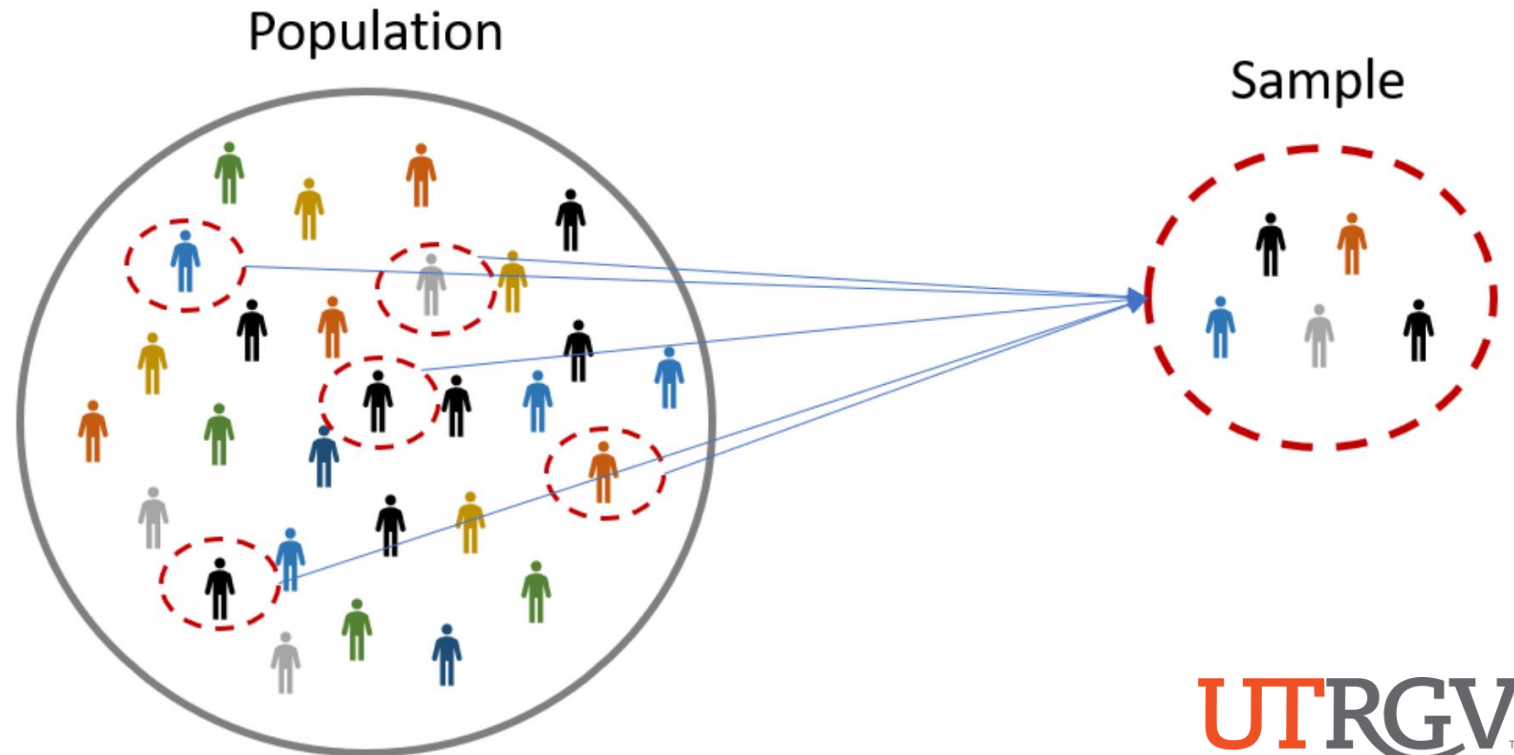


# Methodology

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# Sample ( $N = 15$ )

- Teaching undergraduate large online course
- 14 Female, 2 Male
- Disciplines:
  - 9 Liberal Arts
  - 4 Health Affairs
  - 3 Sciences



# Interview Script

- How do you determine how many academic coaches are used in a course? Do you have a preferred academic coach to student ratio?
- How do you choose academic coaches?
- How often do you communicate with your academic coaches? How often do you meet via conference call or Zoom with your academic coaches? What is discussed in these meetings?
- Please describe the typical responsibilities of an academic coach offering instructional support in your course.
- How do you handle student questions? Do the academic coaches answer student questions, or do you, as the instructor of record, address all student questions?
- What kind of instructions do you give coaches? How do you provide these instructions?
- How do you handle complaints about grading done by an academic coach? Do you check grading done by academic coaches for accuracy or interrater reliability? If yes, please describe your process.
- Please explain an effective strategy you have employed when working with academic coaches? What strategies have been the least effective, when working with academic coaches?
- What are some benefits and risks of having an academic coach provide instructional support in the online course?

# Transcription

- Both investigators conducted semi-structured interviews
- Zoom security deployed
- Anonymous recorded interviews
- Zoom transcriptions were used to develop verbatim word documents
  - Organized by question



# Data Analysis

The screenshot displays a code editor window titled "Instructional Connections BP" with a dark theme. The editor contains a list of questions and their answers, organized into sections. The left sidebar shows a file explorer with a search bar and a list of files and folders, including "14 Audio 15.docx", "15 Audio 16.docx", "Codes (215)", "Memos (1)", "Networks (0)", "Document Groups (7)", and "Code Groups (20)".

**How long have you been teaching online?**  
Since fall 2020.

**What online courses do you teach?**  
introduction to cultural anthropology okay.

**Do you teach undergraduate or graduate courses? Or both?**  
Undergrad only

**Please provide us a snapshot of the student population within an online course you consider typical among those you teach.**  
So the course I teach is a like a general requirement that students can take so I have anywhere from freshmen to seniors non traditional traditional students. There is no prerequisite, so I get a broad array of students in that course.

**How do you determine how many academic coaches are used in a course?**  
depends on the number of students enrolled in class So if I have over 60 I get one academic court coach I don't, but I think the cap of the courses usually around 75-80 students so I've never had more than one just okay.

**Do you have a preferred academic coach to student ratio?**  
I think it works for what it is, I think it would be nicer to have two per class but or two for that class size, but I know that that's the constraints of the program right now.

**How do you choose academic coaches?**  
Based on their qualifications their understanding of anthropology and any recommendations.  
Or if my colleagues have used in the past that's I picked them,

**How often do you communicate with your academic coaches?**  
um I would say, every couple weeks unless there's like something I specifically need to tell them or they have any issue Jason students, then they'll come to me before then, but usually it's just like a check in every couple weeks.

# Results

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# Coach Selection Process

- Assigned to Instructor
- Subject Matter Expertise\*
- Invested Time With Coach

*"Based on their qualifications their understanding of anthropology and any recommendations."*

*"... have a medical background. ...and then, of course, being able to learn in using educational technology, ... they have that background"*

# Coach-Student Ratio



# Communication Frequency





# Communication Description

- Overall coach responsibilities
- Upcoming grading
- Student issues
- Trends post grading\*

*"... what they're required to grade, and how to grade ... in between with those one to two emails per month."*

*"... if there was any issues that came up in grading or trends of things that students misunderstood that I need to kind of address in my weekly lecture videos or announcements."*



# Typical Responsibilities

- Primarily Grading\*
  - Discussions
  - Using grading rubrics
- Address student questions\*

*"Mostly what their capacity is was graders for my courses also they read through students weekly discussion posts, and they provide feedback."*

*"If students have questions about the content, I suggest that they can also reach out to coaches and then the coaches can reach out to me if they have any other questions about it."*

# Student Communication

- Instructor\*
  - Address all/most questions
  - "Instructor of Record"
- Coach
  - Address all/most questions
  - Some required CC instructor
- Split\*
  - Content questions to Instructor
  - Grading questions to Coach

*"I tend to address most of the student questions, and I set that standard, from the onset. ... in other words, I'm point of contact you know first point of contact."*

*"It depends on the level of comfort that the coach has, and it also depends on the question. If it's something simple that the coach can answer and feels comfortable doing <versus> something more substantial, they'll usually forward it to me."*

# Instructions Format

- Email
- Verbal (Zoom)
- Grading rubrics
- Templates\*

*"I'll give like a couple of different examples of how I've graded assignments. assignments that she will be grading as well, and I would typically give like an A, B, C or D and the kind of feedback, I guess, like so that she can see exactly how I would do it, but also to have an idea so like I give a lot more feedback on certain assignments over others ..."*

## Instructions Given

- Pre-course meeting\*
  - Overview of course
  - Types of assignments
  - Grading responsibilities
  - Clear expectations
- During course (email and/or conference calls)
  - Follow-up about upcoming assignments
  - Grading expectations

*"First initial meeting that we have, I give them a rundown of the course I give them the syllabus and the different assignments that we're going to be doing and I tell them how we're going to be running the course what I expect from them."*

# Student Complaints

- Few to No complaints\*
- Primarily related to grading
  - Go back and check grading\*
    - If no error, explain to student why they got their grade
    - If error, make change and notify student and coach
    - Ask coach to review grading

*"I would say, like I haven't really experienced that there's just been that one email ..."*

*"I, first of all, will go ahead and review, whatever the complaint is about and see if I think that the coach was correct or not."*

# Grading Reliability

- Conduct Random Spot Checks\*
- Conduct comparisons
  - More than one coach
  - Run statistics per group
- Conduct Departmental Review\*
  - Inter-rater reliability study
  - Found issue with rubric

*"What I usually do is I go to the grades, in the Grade Center, you can look at everybody's individual grade, I will randomly select somebody, and look over how they graded. "*

*"In the instances where I have more than one coach per class, I run statistics per group to make sure that everybody looks to be right about the same area, to make sure that we're all on the same page."*



# Effective Strategies

- Constant Communication
  - Pre-course meeting
  - Frequent check-ins by email or phone
  - Being open to suggestions
  - Having Zoom Sessions
- Agendas for meetings
- Grading Rubrics
- Give examples
- Feedback prompts to get instructor voice\*

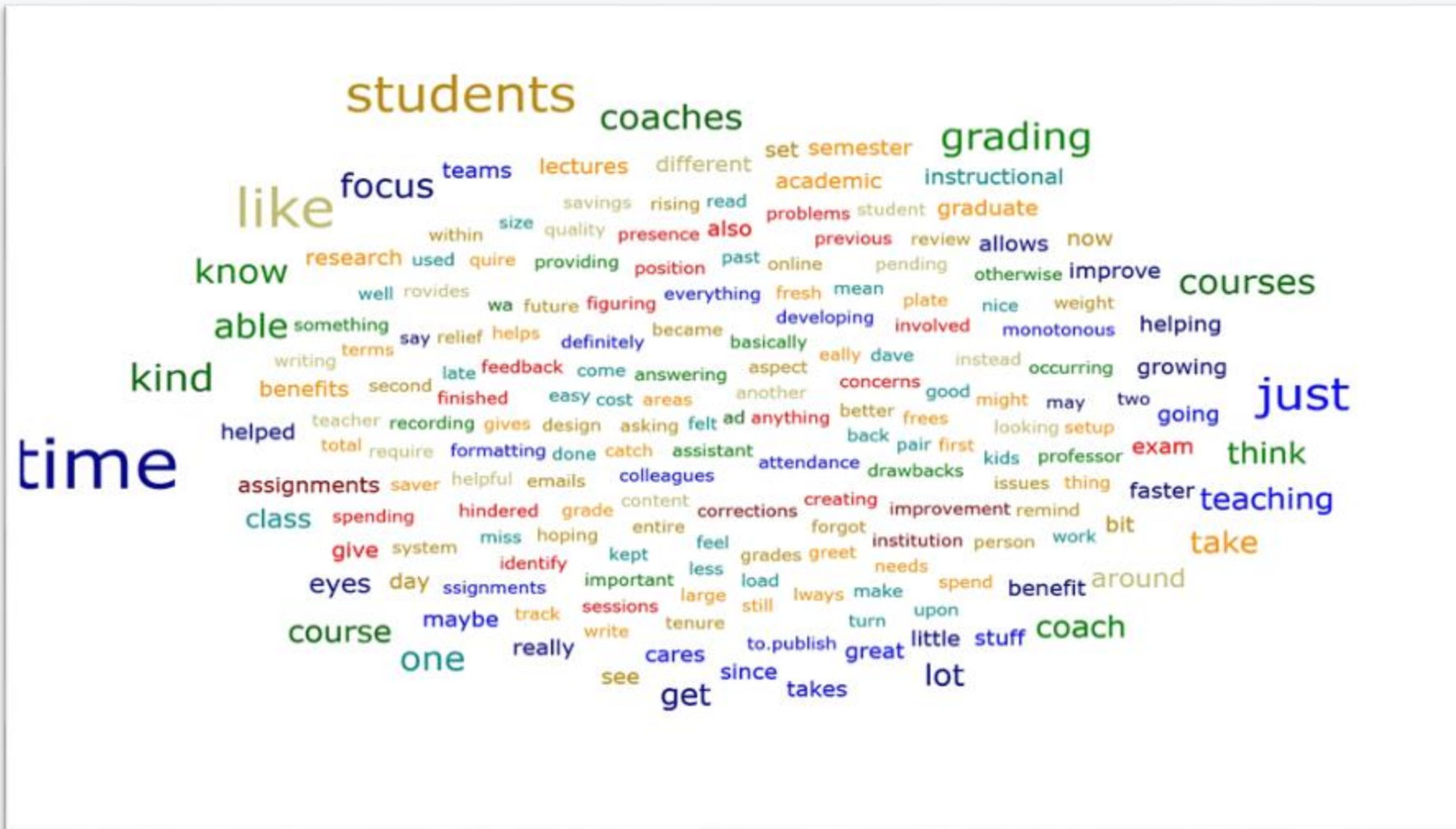
*"The feedback in my own words that worked versus allowing them to kind of write their own."*

## Ineffective Strategies

- N/A
- Off topic Zoom Meetings
- Not Creating Smart Views
- Use of unfamiliar LMS tools
- Not addressing coach grading feedback that is not up to expectations\*

*" ... not that I've done this, but it probably wouldn't be a good thing, like if you notice things weren't being graded or thing weren't being graded according to you know your expectations to not say anything ... "*

# Benefits





# Discussion

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# Advice Tips



Provide clear expectations upfront and be prepared



Establish regular communication/patterns



Create detailed rubrics ahead of time



Be willing to listen to coach ideas and feedback



Don't ask coaches to do something you wouldn't do



Addressing grading issues that arrive transparently

## Lessons Learned

- Consideration of instructor level of experience with coaches within interview script
- More in-depth questions about grading division responsibilities

# Next Steps

- Create faculty resource
- Coaches' perspective
- Future research





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Thank you!

Questions?