Presenting the Canvasadors: Bridging the Information Gap Between Student & Campus

Kat :

Adjusting and trying to make sure that all of our students are equally accounted for in getting the same information so they can all have an equal chance to succeed. That was definitely one of our major, major goals, making sure everything was accessible the same way and everything was just as understandable.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzell and you're listening to The Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezzell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 1:

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 2:

She is a sociology major, and she is transferring to Cal Poly Pomona! Psychology major, English major...

Sun Ezzell:

From transforming part-time into full-time-

Speaker 3:

I really liked the time that you spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 4:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezzell:

And I'm Sun Ezzel Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is The Magic Mountie Podcast. There have been a lot of opportunities where help was needed this year. And though this initiative wasn't born out of the pandemic, it sure came in handy. Once everything went online, I'm talking about a special student services job called The Canvasadors, listen in to learn more about what they do, how they help build bridges between students and all things campus related and who they are. Here's Sun to guide us.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you all so much for joining me today at The Magic Mountie Podcast. I'm really excited to talk with you about The Canvasadors Program. Let's have each of you tell us briefly about yourself, maybe what brings you to Mt. SAC? What are you studying? What made you want to be a Canvasador? And then we'll go from there.

Jose Gutierrez:

Hello. My name is Jose Gutierrez. I actually just transferred out of Mt. SAC as a mechanical engineering student to San Jose State. I'll probably be taking future general ed. classes at Mt. SAC in near future. And the thing that attracted me the most to being a Mt. SAC Canvasador, was just having an on-campus job actually, and just having that flexibility to be on campus already. I can just go to work and go to class and also having an on-campus job, your advisors or supervisors know that you're a student, so they're very flexible with your hours and when you have midterms. I was like, that's perfect for me, especially as an engineering student, you need as much as flexibility as possible to study and get your projects in on time.

Kat :

All right, I'm Kat. And I'm just about to transfer out of Mt. SAC, so I'm applying right now as a cognitive science major, hopefully with a concentration in neuroscience. And what brought me to the Canvasadors job was... I was job searching and I got the email for it. And I was like, this is a great opportunity for me to step up in my leadership because I've always had odd leadership roles around my community and around whatever I'm involved in. And I was like, this is great, we would be starting something brand new and definitely being on-campus and the flexible hours was a huge bonus. And now we have this small little family that helps students, and it's so nice.

Will:

I'll go ahead then. My name is Will, I'm actually an international student from Canada. I'm studying Aviation Science here at Mt. SAC right now. What brought me to becoming a Canvasador is not many people know that international students actually can't work anywhere else, but on campus if they're studying in the States. That led me right down this path and I'm very happy for it. It's opened up a lot of doors for me. It's filled a lot of bridges for me in California considering I didn't know anybody here before, so very thankful to be here.

Sun Ezzell:

Great. Thank you all so much. I was wondering if you could tell a little bit about what is a Canvasador and what are some common questions that Mt. SAC students have about using Canvas?

Jose Gutierrez:

Basically the job description for being a Canvasador was helping students out with anything Canvas related and also just pointing them in the correct direction to any resources they might need. For example, they might not specifically need help with Canvas, but they don't know who to talk to for financial aid, so we would just point them in that direction. But ever since the pandemic, the role has definitely evolved. It's definitely become a bridge between students and any other programs. Basically we try to bridge that gap. And also we've become data analysts because we do send surveys out and try to get student feedback so that we can mold our program around that feedback, so we can better serve our students.

Kat :

And on the topic of what questions we've gotten from students. Definitely a lot of it is first or second week stress where they can't find their classes or they're not being able to see assignments, and they don't know what to do on the first day. And that's showed itself immensely because everything is online now. And so you don't have a professor to go to, to be like, hey, I'm here, I'm on the wait list because if you're on the wait list now, you can't see your course at all. And that's really stressful for students. We've dealt with Zoom issues. We've had questions about emails and external programs that students would use in Canvas, so if somebody is using wait list-Hill, or if they're using Newton, one of the chemistry programs, we would be able to help with that too.

Will:

And I just wanted to add another common question we do get at the beginning of the semester is viewing your Canvas course. If it hasn't been published yet by your professor, don't panic, chances are, they may just haven't done it yet. And the best way to confirm that is to just send them an email and they should be able to confirm that for you.

Jose Gutierrez:

And also, if I could add, we also create a lot of content for students. We worked very closely with FCLT in the beginning, but then we transitioned over to working with ASAC a lot. We put a lot of content out, such as hosting workshops for Zoom and Canvas, and creating how to videos. For example, how to submit an assignment on Canvas, how to use the features on Zoom. A lot of people have problems with logging into the Mt. SAC portal, so we made a how to video on how to deal with that problem. Those are just some of the resources we've actually created ourselves and try to get out to students so that they're a little more informed.

Kat :

Not to mention, we made our own Canvas course so students could see a layout or they could get all of our resources at once. And it's perfect because it's just in Canvas, which all of our Mt. SAC students have access for it and so it's easier to get to them trying to find it in some obscure webpage on the portal.

Sun Ezzell:

That's great. Thank you for being so extremely responsive to students' needs, as you discover them along the way. One of you mentioned the pandemic, how do you think that this whole transition is going for students to being online suddenly, maybe students who had never planned to take an online class, how is that going?

Jose Gutierrez:

As a student personally, I was lucky to have taken an online course before the pandemic happened, so I was a little used to being on Canvas and not having any communication with my professor besides just an email. That transition wasn't too bad. But as a Canvasador, I came to realize that not many people had ever had any interactions online with professors. It was very difficult for them to adapt and so when we went online, back in March, a lot of the worries was like, okay, my professor doesn't use Canvas at all, so how are they going to mold their curriculum to fit just on Canvas and Zoom and whatever.

Jose Gutierrez:

That was challenging for us to get used to, and also, I can't imagine as a student, that must have been really challenging for yourself too, just because a lot of students need that structure of going to school and then being able to succeed at school. Meanwhile, home is where all the distractions are, like your bed's right there, your kitchen's right there, your games are right there. I think that's for me personally, one of the biggest challenges once the pandemic really began to hit.

Kat :

After that we've definitely been seeing, I think a lot of older students coming back to school because it's convenient and it wasn't as easy of a transition to them because these are programs that they've never used before, versus your recent high school graduates that have been using Canvas that have maybe used like Skype or something of the sorts before. And so adjusting and trying to make sure that all of our students are equally accounted for in getting the same information so they can all have an equal chance to succeed. That was definitely one of our major, major goals, making sure everything was accessible the same way and everything was just as understandable.

Will:

Yeah. And it couldn't have been a better timing for us to start this position at Mt. SAC as Canvasadors, because obviously a couple of months later, we all went online. It was definitely handy to have us around this year for sure.

Sun Ezzell:

It sounds like you've made a lot of students' lives much easier this year. Thank you so much for your hard work. I was wondering, what's something that you wish the faculty knew about students' experiences with Canvas after being Canvasadors right now.

Kat :

Please check your emails. One of the issues that we have gotten with faculty or with students that have been unable to reach their faculty members or their professors, my apologies is that they don't know where the syllabus is. They don't know what time they should be contacting them. And the sheer panic that we get from students, if it's four or five hours before their class is scheduled to start and they still haven't seen their Canvas course, they start to panic. And there's so little that we can do because that means we have to go find the class, find the CRN and then email the professor herself, which likely they're not answering because they're getting hundreds of thousands of email from their students.

Kat :

And a small explanation to the structure of the Canvas course because students, when a professor doesn't have a stereotypical looking course or they have things in different places, it starts to confuse people. And so we'll have to go in with them and be like, okay, these are all the possible places that they can go and that these assignments can be in, but we can't actually see it because that's an invasion of privacy and we don't want to mess with the student's work or anything.

Jose Gutierrez:

Yeah. The biggest challenge was, or the biggest complaint I heard from students was a lack of a uniform template from professors. And working with FCLT, I know now that they do have a template that professors can use for their classes so that students from STEM can easily use classes from the business section, but it's really up to the professors to actually use those resources. And we've learned that professors are very reluctant to change their ways. And therefore the students are the ones who suffer in the end because they're the ones who have to take on the brunt of getting used to one form of teaching and then another form of teaching. Proxy students for being able to adapt very easily and just a little shout out to professors to be a little more understanding of students' challenges right now.

Will:

And I just wanted to add as well, obviously, before we all switched to online, we had many points of contact to get in contact with our professors. Obviously, we had emailed before we had office hours, we had even after class, but now we usually only have one or two points of contact. And I think it's important for faculty and professors to... and for students too to maintain a level of communication between each other and it keeps us all engaged.

Sun Ezzell:

Thank you all so much. Do you have any advice for students based on your experience at Mt. SAC as students and transfer students and your work with Canvas through the Canvassador Program?

Kat :

It's not worth the stress that you're putting on it, because from what I've seen personally as a student, is that we tend to stress about a lot of things that end up being so easy later, or not even easy, but they just... It buffs out later and it builds an unimaginable amount of stress on students. And I just want to tell people, calm down, Mt. SAC has a wonderful support system. And so if you can't find the information somewhere, somebody else is going to be able to help you.

Kat :

Definitely as a student in the pandemic, I've seen the ways that students try to get together. There's at least some connection. It's nothing compared to being in person. You're not able to see your people. You're not able to talk to them, but we've made Discords, group chats, GroupMes , and we're just trying to figure it out. And if somebody's struggling with something like, I've had classmates that were helping me with admissions, I've had classmates that were actually coming back because they were getting a career change. And so you learn with the people and so just breathe. You're going to find somebody to help you.

Jose Gutierrez:

My advice for students would be to... First of all, when relating to Canvas is to actually go to Canvas for whichever course it is, and just play around with everything that the professor might have in that course, just get used to how they set up their own course, take advantage of all the practice assignments or practice exams that they have, because when the actual assignment comes and when the actual quiz or exam comes around, then you're already familiar with the setup and everything. And also to take advantage of all the resources that the school has, because I feel like a lot of students don't know that there's so many resources out there. For example, The Student Hub, I didn't even know about that until I became a Canvasador and there's so many good resources on there. For example, Proctorio now that a lot of professors are using it, there's plenty of how to videos and infographics that students can use to relieve a little bit of the anxiety of having Proctorio on your browser.

Jose Gutierrez:

And also, I mean, we have a bunch of resources Canvasadors too. And the only thing though, is that students do need to go hunting for them, which might be something that we need to improve on as faculty and student workers is trying to just get the word out there. So hopefully this podcast is able to help bridge that.

Will:

And I just wanted to add some advice related to Canvas, actually. Now that everything's online, it's a lot harder to track what you're doing. You don't have your professor telling you at the end of class what's due next week. What I've actually been using is the mobile app. And even on the browser, on my computer or the to-do list and the calendar in Canvas, you can see everything that's due, it's all there in front of you for each class. It's very easy to navigate and very useful. So hopefully someone makes use of that.

Sun Ezzell:

Great. Thank you. Folks might be wondering what's the best way to connect students with Canvasadors.

Kat :

Definitely through our email, which is canvasadors@mtsac.edu.

Jose Gutierrez:

We also have social media pages. We have an Instagram, a Twitter, and a Facebook, and it's all @canvasadors, so very easy. And also if you go to the ASAC, there's a little space for us there, the ASAC website, it's a little space for Canvasadors there. That would take you to our Canvas course, and you can find more contact information there, but yeah, like Kate said, the easiest way for most people is probably just emailing us canvasadors@mtsac.edu.

Will:

And for the time being as well, you can actually find us in the ASAC virtual lab as well. You can find us there.

Sun Ezzell:

In the virtual lab, does that mean that you're on Zoom and available to help students?

Will:

Yep. That's correct. Yep.

Sun Ezzell:

Great.

Will:

You can just let them know in the main room that you're looking for help with Canvas and they should direct you to one of us.

Sun Ezzell:

Great. We'll put all those resources in the show notes for the podcast in case anybody wants to access them there. I was wondering, this must be kind of an interesting experience for you as students to be Canvasadors and supporting fellow students. I was wondering what have you learned or discovered in your role as a Canvasador about online learning or about collaboration or about yourself?

Will:

I think personally, I've learned that whenever I get into a situation now, when it comes to... I could be confused with online learning, whether it's trying to access a textbook, it's not just me, everybody has their hiccups and nobody's perfect. I think it's good to ask questions and look for resources when you need them.

Kat :

I think as a student what I've learned about myself is that I don't thrive in the online environment, which I don't imagine that anybody does because we're social creatures. But in terms of Canvas, I learned a little bit more ins and outs and it's nicer being able to be in a position where I'm able to help a lot more people than if I was just one student in a class.

Jose Gutierrez:

I think one of the things that was a little shocking to me was just that being a STEM major, I'm very integrated in my STEM bubble. I don't really interact with other majors or other types of people that are not in STEM. Being an Canvasador, you're exposed to so many other people and so many other age groups that you're just like, wow, this community is bigger than just me and my bubble. There's so many more things you need to cater to than just your little group of science deeds, and just making information and resources available to so many people of so many backgrounds and so many economic resources or ages is definitely something that has opened my mind to being more inclusive in what I do, and like my projects.

Jose Gutierrez:

And another thing that has really opened my eyes being a Canvasador, is just the bureaucracy behind a lot of things that go along, for example, testing out new things so that we can roll it out to students and then rolling it out to a small group of students, seeing how they react to it. And if it's good then you go with that to the general population, and then if it's not good then you go back to the drawing board and it takes a lot of time and I have a lot more respect for faculty and professors and what they have to go through just to get things approved for students to use. That's definitely been an eye opening experience and I'm very grateful for it.

Kat :

Definitely adapting to change is something that we need to do if we want to keep growing. And that goes for both students and faculty, because as a student, I was really unhappy with having to use Proctorio, I was like, this is invasive, I don't want to use this. But looking at it from the faculty point of view, this is one of the very few ways that they can actually monitor the information that's going through while you're taking a test. And so maintaining the integrity of the test and also maintaining the integrity of your degree.

Will:

After this year, especially just seeing how resilient some of us are and how well we did to stay on track with things. I know for a few weeks there at the end of March and beginning of April, it was very tough, and I know we took... I think it was a one or two-week break before classes have returned to normal. Well for online, not normal. I think some people struggled, but I think a lot of people did a great job with the transition. It makes me proud for everybody here at Mt. SAC.

Kat :

If nothing else, this made connections, because as a Canvasador alone, I don't think any of our Canvasadors would have known each other if it wasn't for this job. Unlikely circumstances will bring people together.

Sun Ezzell:

That's lovely. Thank you. Is there anything we didn't get to talk about the Canvasadors Program that you'd like to share?

Will:

Well, I think after this year, it's been very tough for us to... I mean, obviously we were very useful online and I think it does, like I said, it was no better time for us to be around, I think, but I'd wish we had more time to advocate on campus and gather more of a following because it has been harder online. We're trying our best, but it would have been nice to have a chance to do that in person as well. Hopefully we have the chance in the future to do that.

Jose Gutierrez:

My final words would probably be just use resources available to you, go to the Mt. SAC website, click around. You'll never know what you're going to find. For example, we actually just set out a list of free programs that students can use that range from Adobe, to Autodesk, to discount at Spotify and Amazon, resources like that are available to all students. And you might never have found out about those unless you actually searched around and just poked around. Make sure you use all the resources that the school is able to provide to you, including us. Make sure to follow us on social media and on our Canvas course, or just look for us in the Mountie Student Hub.

Kat :

I think definitely don't be afraid to ask, because I've had recently a student come to me and they were like, I've been struggling with this for so long. And it was the first time that we were able to set up a meeting with them and we were able to fix it within five or 10 minutes on a call. And so it was, it's really, really fulfilling for us to see that we're actually making a difference to the students. And we get our share of angry emails because of things that are out of our control, but the ones that we see, we were able to help, that just puts a smile on all of our faces at the end of the day. And it's like, we sit down and we're like good job team. We were able to help one student.

Kat :

Mt. SAC has an immense amount of students, but the six of us just being able to help at least one person a day that's what our job is about. And so if students were less prideful and I say prideful, because I know as a student, I hate asking and I'm going to go find the thing myself, because it's online, I'm going to go find it myself. If people were less prideful and came to ask, it's definitely worth it.

Will:

And answering these sorts of questions, it doesn't just help you learn, it helps us learn along the way as well. Which makes things better in the long run.

Sun Ezzell:

Well, I just want to thank you for being a lifeline for so many folks during this really stressful time, it's hard enough to be a student and to be able to reach out and find a friendly person really makes a difference. And I know that too, as a faculty member, I'm not an online person. I'd never taught online. And I'm thinking of a particular colleague who isn't judgey, who I was able to reach out to and ask for help and was very patient with me. And didn't sigh or roll her eyes or laugh or anything like that when asked simple questions. And so I'm sure there are many, many students who feel the same way about all of you, so thank you for the work that you're doing. And I was just wondering, what's next for you all, some of you are transferring, some of you have already transferred.

Jose Gutierrez:

I think first things first, we are on a grant. The program might not be here after December. However, all the people at the ASAC and the library division are working very hard to keep our program going with other grants or with actual funding from school. We'll see where that goes. But if we do continue, I think our presence on campus will continue to grow. And with that, hopefully we can help more students out.

Sun Ezzell:

That's great. Thank you so much. Well, I'll definitely be crossing my fingers that the program is able to continue. I imagine that we'll have increased online offerings for some time to come. It's so lovely to talk with you. And I just want to thank you all so much for your thoughtful and dedicated work, supporting your fellow students during this time, especially, and for making the time to talk with me today.

Jose Gutierrez:

Thanks for having us. This was a lot of fun actually.

Will:

Thanks for having us.

Christina Barsi:

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