

Keywords

Name of organization: International Student Center at Ontario University

Nature of business: Student Service Provider

Sector (one or more keywords): Education (Transition and Immigration, Student Programming)

Business process description: Booking Appointments

The Organization

The International Student Center (ISC) at an Ontario University is an office under the Department of Student Affairs that offers and programs and services for international students and internationally minded local students. It is located in the student center and consists of the manager, three Immigration and Transition advisors, two Global Mobility Coordinators, one Intercultural Education Coordinator, one Program and Events Coordinator/ Administrator and around 18 work-study students.

The center supports close to 3500 international students who make up 20% of the university's total student body. Services offered by the center include help applying for study permits, return visas, post-graduation work permits, health insurance claims, information on exchange programs, and transition advising. It also has a strong Intercultural Education Program which coordinates and supports many international education fairs and intercultural workshops and festivals, allowing domestic and international students to make meaningful connections and discover various international opportunities. The advisors have many years of experience in dealing with international student populations and the issues they face. Their main challenge lies in providing students with quality services and programming as their demand increases with a growing student body.

The Business Process

Aside from providing each other with program and planning support, all eight staff members are connected through the appointment making process. Many recent changes have been made to the system, some being just a month old. The current appointment booking system is as follows.

Work-study students are the frontline staff to all student inquiries. They use the university's Career Network to manage appointments. Depending on the advisor and the question at hand, the work-study students can recommend one of many routes. For immigration questions, student staff first ask if the student has a MYCIC account. If they don't, then they have to come back after creating it. Students can either come to drop-in hours for quick questions like looking over a completed legal application or book appointments for more lengthy discussions. For transition issues (academic issues, hard time making friends, etc.), students can book appointments or come for drop-ins (depending on the length of the discussion), without any pre-screening process. The advisors plan their schedules together so that if one of them is having drop in hours in the morning and appointments in the afternoon, the others are having appointments in the morning and drop-ins in the afternoon; this strategy allows the Immigration and Transition coordinators to be as available as possible.

Emergency immigration issues, however, can override the whole appointment booking system. Sometimes, students come to the front desk when there are only a few days left before their study permits expires or after the permits have already expired. In such cases, advisors have to make time outside their time slots for appointments (drop-in or booked) to help the student gather all the necessary documents and often the manager steps in to expedite the process of recovering documents from specific university departments. This has been left out of the BPM diagram on purpose to keep the process simple, as this is not a frequent event.

Questions about the university health plan or the extended coverage plan are usually managed by front desk work-study students. Complex or information-sensitive queries about UHIP or Income tax are referred to the Events and Programming coordinator/administrator.

For general questions on outbound exchange, summer abroad or research exchange, students are advised to sign up for group advising sessions. If students have further questions about the application process, then they are advised sign up for one on one meetings held by work-study students with previous international experiences. Appointments are only booked with the Global Mobility Coordinators if students have specific questions about funding or finalizing applications.

Students can email specific coordinators to request appointments or (for transition issues) can book appointments online through the Career Network.

This process appears to work smoothly and has served the ISC well in the past. However, as the number of students seeking these services increases, more pressure will fall on the system to manage the load as efficiently as possible. The demand for ISC services peak at the beginning of the school year as for many incoming students, it is their first time dealing with visas, study permits, health insurance, etc. The beginning of the year is also when the ISC hosts a number of orientation and sightseeing events. These require a lot of logistics management from the coordinators and man-power, often in the form of work study students.

Based on their availability, commitments to running events and the limited work hours (due to being work-study students), sometimes the front desk may be left unattended. The responsibility of managing student queries for those periods of time fall on the Events and Programming Coordinator and administrator who also manages the front desk student staff. If she is out for an event or a meeting, then other advisers try to help with student queries. The advisers are busy with their own planning and tasks and interruptions in their work may lead their projects to be delayed or lessen the quality of their work.

BPMN Model See last page

Suitability

The ISC is a good organization to explore for subsequent assignments because the center deals with a population of the student body that is vulnerable to falling through the cracks of the support networks the university provides: International Students. Ironically, it is they who pay the most for these services and therefore, should receive the best quality of services. Whether due to cultural differences or language barriers, it can be very difficult to navigate through a post-secondary institution and or even know when to seek help. The staff members at the ISC are aware of this and are interested in knowing about changes that may positively impact the quality and productivity of their services. There are a few areas that have potential for:

Automation

- The appointment system uses the Career Network which makes the process simpler as students are notified and reminded of their appointments automatically. However, the Career Network sends a standard reminder with standard information to appointments from different offices. If the appointment booking form on the Career Network can include a textbox where extra information can be put in to send as part of the appointment reminder, it would make things more efficient so students can remember what tasks to complete or documents to have ready before the appointment
- Create a database of student information (or a sub-database using information from Student Records) which includes the student's study permit expiry date. Perhaps the database system can synchronize with the Career Network to send students reminder emails when their study permits are close to expiring. This can take some stress off the advisers and the unsuspecting student.

Innovation

- There seem to be too many access points into the appointment system; students booking appointments online, students coming to the desk, students emailing advisers about appointments. Although it offers flexibility to students, the task is very redundant and resources and time can be saved by having the front desk deal with all student appointments
- Decomposing the Event and programming coordinator/administrator's front desk tasks by placing more responsibility on work-study students. Perhaps offering special training for student staff to handle confidential student information so breaches of confidence do not occur. This can maximize the event coordinator's time for other administrative tasks.

Transformation

- Instead of improving the appointment making system, it would serve the ISC better to completely redesign the way the front desk is run; having dedicated staff for the front desk could serve the ISC well in the long run, whether that means assigning work-study student who only manage the front desk, hiring casual staff during peak times of the year or hiring a full time staff for the front desk. The front desk person can handle all incoming calls and emails; this way the service provided and information shared will be consistent, organized and efficient. Other tasks such as printing and copying documents for all advisors as well as placing room bookings and food orders for events and workshops can be done by a full time receptionist, allowing for coordinators to plan more innovative and collaborative student programs.
- Specifically for transition and global mobility programming, it may serve the coordinators well to team up with student clubs and host collaborative workshops and sessions highlighting the services both groups offer for better outreach to the student body.

Staff Members observed for this case study:

Manager

* Program and Events Coordinator/Administrator

* Intercultural Education Coordinator

* Global Mobility Coordinator

Global Mobility Coordinator

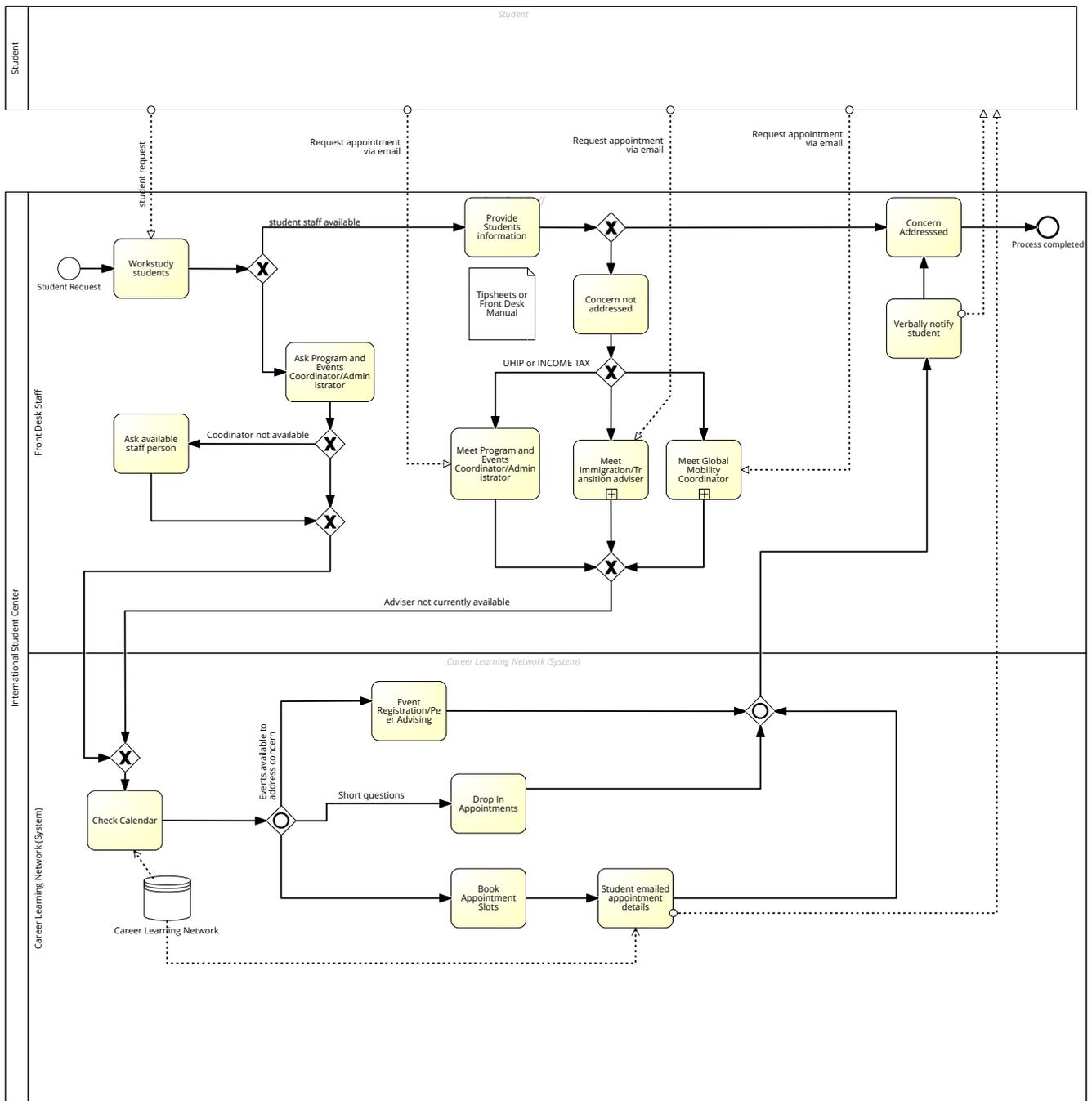
* Immigration and Transition Advisor

* Immigration and Transition Advisor

Immigration and Transition Advisor

(* indicates people officially interviewed)

International Student Center Appointment Booking System



Global Mobility sub-process



Immigration/Transition sub-process

