

Humanizing Relationships with Technology

Do you ever feel overwhelmed during a busy day of back-to-back advising appointments? How can you possibly cover everything you need with a new student? Can you remember the last first-year orientation you attended or participated in? The higher education landscape is a new world of jargon, procedures, and segmented processes across multiple departments. Students and their families must know where and how to do almost everything to ensure payments get posted on time and hope funds become available for learning materials (too often, they are not). Advisors tend to become the front-line university officials for all questions related to enrollment, computer systems, housing, parking, cashiering, and student aid. The sheer amount of information transfer topics can overwhelm learners and leave advisors feeling like information oracles. The current setup makes advisors the great knowers of all things for parents, departments, and colleagues, which forces them to become the gatekeepers of university policy and procedures. Despite feeling like it at times, advisors are not robots.

Blended Learning and Advising

Advisors help learners navigate and make sense of their transition into adulthood through the decision-making opportunities learners find while exploring their academic goals (Ellingham, 2018). When employed in a significant learning environment (Harapnuik, n.d.), technology can help create and maintain a focus on the learning outcomes of advising. By incorporating blended learning (Horn & Staker, 2017), learners become empowered to choose topics of inquiry that interest them at times that work with their schedule and in formats that appeal to their learning preferences. Through this learning autonomy, learners' interest and active participation increase (Harapnuik et al., 2018; Horn & Staker, 2017), which helps them evaluate options, make important decisions, and have difficult conversations.

Support Resources for Advisors and Advisees

Like a flipped classroom, an innovation to advising that incorporates digital tools provides a limitless opportunity for ongoing dialogues between learners and advisors. Some examples would be the introduction of discussion boards in a learning management system (LMS) or an online blog for reflections (McIntosh et al., 2020; TEDxTalks, 2019). These types of discussion boards and reflection blogs create digital connections that have the potential to create a learning community of caring individuals. Using these blended learning approaches, advisors can pose thought-provoking questions while encouraging learners to accept ever-increasing ownership of their college experience (Harapnuik et al., 2018). Advising teams can moderate problem-solving exercises related to the topics posed while encouraging meaningful dialogue between learners that helps foster a sense of community and belonging.

Our creative thoughts are the only boundaries on the opportunity to utilize technology to humanize our relationships (Denton, 2012). Classroom environments like Google Classroom, Google Forms, and Google Drive file-sharing capabilities expand the opportunity for thoughtful feedback and clarifying questions among learners and advising teams. Extending the learning experience through various cloud-based options (Denton, 2012; Liao et al., 2013; Stevenson & Hedberg, 2011; TED, 2013), advisors can employ micro-lectures (Noah, 2013), video-based content, ePortfolio resources, blogging tools, and other digital resources that reinforce the relationship goals. Technology can create a living-learning community of advisors, learners, and peer advisors who mentor students on general topics and how-tos. Learners connect with wider campus communities of success and support as students connect and collaborate on questions of inquiry, information scavenger hunts, and virtual or on-campus meet-ups at events and campus discussions. These ongoing and collaborative discussions online can expand the advising

relationship while supporting advisors and learners as they co-navigate the higher education landscape to help learners discover newfound responsibilities and freedoms throughout their learning experience.

Supporting Each Other

By sharing the different options and opportunities in the effective use of digital tools, we each consider innovations for our advising relationships. Technology tools now facilitate an authentic learning opportunity that gives learners choice, ownership, and voice (Harapnuik et al., 2018) while creating a culture of supportive encouragement for one another as learners. The collaboration (Stevenson & Hedberg, 2013) that learners can offer one another encourages critical thinking and problem-solving, thereby alleviating advisors from being the sole translator of university policy, procedure, and support. Further exploration and collaboration on the use of technology in advising may help other advising units consider ways to deepen their advising relationships to support learners throughout their academic pursuits. Advisors can work together to refine further and improve the available tools and resources provided to students transitioning to college/university life and those matriculating through various stages of learning.

Lesson Learned

Be open and vulnerable and embrace a perpetual state of trial and error. Change is only possible if your mindset is in the proper alignment. Instead, the willingness to try new things and move on from things that are not working is critical. Reflect constantly and ask for constructive feed forward from everyone involved (learners, advisors, and other campus stakeholders). Learning in this rapidly changing and digitally connected world means we must continue trying new things to reach our learners. Beyond onboarding and registering students, advisors strive to help learners thrive while adapting to a new world. Advisors also support students in their

exploration of their hopes, their dreams, and their path in an ever-evolving potential future. Gonick (2023) challenges advisors to "construct compelling narratives that invite learners to chart their learning journeys." We must find ways to engage them in this process actively, or they will disappear into the busyness of college life and potentially fall off our radar. Continuous collaboration and reflection on flipped advising (Steele et al., 2016) opportunities help guide the innovation process, ensuring that digital tools enhance student learning and advising relationships.

Conclusion

Together, we can humanize relationships with technology so advisors can stop feeling like a broken record of knowledge and resources. Instead, we create a reflective and ongoing conversation between advisor and advisee supported by a library of self-serve resources that further humanize the experience for our learners. Pre-engaging our learners in college life decisions about majors and coursework, policies and procedures, deadlines and requirements so that their actual conversation with advisors can be about transformative things instead of transactional ones. Advisors can scaffold their learners' onboarding needs by creating videos, documents, audio clips, and micro-lectures (Noah, 2023). Together, we can design resources that help to free these professionals to do the meaningful work that keeps them in the advising profession (Troxel et al., 2021).

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