Overview

Over NACADA’s 14 webinar seasons, a number of presenters have looked at a variety of communication techniques and strategies, based in theory, research, and their own experience. Because communication lies at the heart of relationship building, communication topics always draw large audiences and leave attendees asking for more.

At the 2019 NACADA Annual Conference in Louisville, KY, presentation teams from the University of Vermont and the University of Missouri shared communication practices that have proved effective with their students in both face-to-face settings and via email. Attendees described these presentations as “practical, applicable advice” that “challenged common practices with solid solutions.” These teams have joined together to share information and strategies that can assist advisors in building their communication skills and enhance interactions with their advisees.

Grounded in framing and communication theories, as well as research conducted at their institutions, the presenters will discuss methods and activities for strengthening both oral and written communications with students. They will provide action steps that attendees may implement on their own campuses, as “communication champions,” to build a culture of strong advisor-advisee communication.

Academic Advising Core Competencies that will be addressed in this presentation include:

C4 Understanding of academic advising approaches and strategies
I7 Knowledge of information technology applicable to relevant advising roles
R2 Ability to create rapport and build academic advising relationships
R3 Ability to communicate in an inclusive and respectful manner
R4 Ability to plan and conduct successful advising interactions

References and Resources

AdZou Communications Working Group, University of Missouri, 6 Dec. 2017.

Best Practices | University Communications and Marketing | SIU. University Communications and Marketing, SIU Board of Trustees, 8 Feb 2017. universitycommunications.siu.edu/campus/social-media/best-practices.php


Email Communication Tips

1. Personalize It
   - Send the email from an actual person, rather than just a resource account
   - Use the student’s name so they know it was meant specifically for them
   - To maximize efficiency, use Outlook tools like mail merge and snippets

2. Be Short. Quick. Brief. Concise
   - Make the entire email short to limit the need to scroll down
   - Use clear bullet points instead of long paragraphs

3. Use Readable Language & Formatting
   - Remove Passive Voice
   - Add links in body text instead of listing lengthy content in the email
   - Use color or bold formats to draw the reader in
   - Use language students use, rather than university jargon (For example: Change major vs. Transfer of division)

4. Make it Relevant
   - Be intentional
   - Make the content meaningful to the audience. Have the message reflect their needs and/or interests

5. Call Them to Action
   - What do you want the student to do? Use language that gives simple directions
   - Limit the number of items listed, keeping the instructions clear

6. Make it Timely
   - Think about your audience – When is a student likely to look at an email? Aim for times close to 10 a.m. rather than late-nights, weekends, or holidays
   - In the mix of all of the communication students get, an email could be missed and ignored so don’t assume anything

Adapted from AdZou and EAB research
### Make your Subject Line Do More Work
*A Good First Impression Drives Higher Open Rates*

1. **Nine Effective Approaches**
   *Adapted from Advisory Board’s internal guidelines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catchy</td>
<td>Oops - you missed your registration deadline!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Concerned about your midterm grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
<td>URGENT: Your academic plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Next steps to get you back on track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational</td>
<td>Let’s chat about chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysterious</td>
<td>You qualify for a new program!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding</td>
<td>How to improve GPA at the Tutoring Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action oriented</td>
<td>Schedule some time with me this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Is there a reason you haven’t registered yet?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Write for your Audience**
   *Effective messages are student-centered and student-friendly*

   Tone Should Focus on Students and Their Goals, Not Rules or Policies

   **Impersonal Copy**
   “Whitehouse University cares about your success and offers a number of resources for students in need of additional support. Students have found the tutoring center to be critical in improving their GPA for admission into certain selective programs.”

   **Student-Centered Copy**
   “I care about your success and noticed that your math midterm grade is not up to standards for the Business School, which you want to apply for next semester. You should schedule an appointment with the tutoring center.”

3. **Language Should be Clear to All Students**
   *Including ESL*

   - **Reduce multisyllabic words**
     “Exempted” = “Do not need to”

   - **Translate jargon**
     “Non-credit-bearing” = “Doesn’t count”

   - **Remove Passive Voice**
     “If you are contacted” = “If your advisor by your advisor contacts you”

   - **Ensure Readability**
     The Gunning Fox Index is an online tool to assess the grade-level of a given text
Worksheet: Student Communications Audit

Purpose of the Tool
This worksheet will help you identify common missteps that prevent students from understanding and acting on emails from the university. It’s designed as a group or independent activity to ensure student-friendly communications.

1. Why?
   Identify the purpose of the message. What is it meant to teach the student or get them to do?

2. Who?
   Identify the target for your message.

3. When?
   Plan the date and time for your message.

4. Assess Readability
   Copy and paste the message into the Gunning-Fog Index online tool: www.gunning-fog-index.com. Then fill in the following information.

   - **Gunning-Fog Index Score**
     Recommended score: 10 or lower
     Based on the Gunning-Fox Index, is the message readable for the average student?
     Does the message avoid passive voice?
     Does the message address the student as “you” and appeal to their motivation?
     Does the message include a clear, explicit next step or call to action?

   - **Number of Words**
     Recommended number: <200 words
     Does the message address the student as “you” and appeal to their motivation?

   - **Number of 3+ Syllable Words**
     Recommended number: <20 words
     Does the message include a clear, explicit next step or call to action?

5. Identify Jargon in the Message
   Translate jargon into plain-speak explanations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jargon</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g., Prerequisite</td>
<td>e.g., a course you must complete before X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Word Bank: Common Higher Education Jargon
- disbursement
- subsidized
- dismissal
- probation
- bursar
- deficit
- registrar
- eligibility
- audit
- misconduct
- academic
- standing
Email Template Example

1. Student Seeking Admission into a Selective Program, in Need of Support

Subject: You qualify for our new program!

Dear <FirstName>,

Welcome back! We hope that you had an amazing summer and that you are rested up and ready to start the fall 2017 semester.

As you know, the nursing program has a competitive admissions process based upon grades earned. Over the last couple of years, the average cumulative GPA for students accepted to the nursing program has been 3.7 and above. You are receiving this email because we’ve noticed that your cumulative GPA is currently <GPA 3.0 to 3.5>, which qualifies you to take advantage of our new program designed to give pre-nursing students an additional layer of support by meeting with a specialized advisor.

Use this link to schedule a program appointment or respond to this email to attend one of the office hours listed below.

2. Student Struggling to Meet GPA Requirements for His/Her Major

Subject: URGENT - Chemistry Plans

Hi <FirstName>,

Welcome back! We hope that you had an amazing summer and that you are rested up and ready to start the fall 2017 semester.

I am writing to follow up about an email I sent a week ago. Most science-related industries generally look for students with a 2.8 GPA or higher. I noticed that you currently have a <Cumulative GPA >2.5>. I would like to meet with you in person to discuss your goals and create action steps together. Please use the link below on or before Wednesday, October 22, to schedule an appointment during the week of October 27.

If you have decided to switch majors, please respond to this email and let me know so that I can work with you to ensure that the department does not put an advising hold on your account.

Have a great day!
3 Student Who Missed Registration Deadline

Subject: Is there a reason you have not yet registered for classes?

Name,

Your registration window closes **April 1 (tomorrow)** at 11:00 am. To have the best opportunity to get to the classes you want, you need to **register before the window closes**.

If you are not able to complete your scheduling by 11:00 am tomorrow, you will have to wait until Schedule Cleanup (April 27-May 8), and you are less likely to get the schedule you want.

If you need assistance, please let me know.

4 Student Who Made a Successful Major Change

Subject: Excited for your new Journey!

Hi <FirstName>,

I noticed that you successfully changed your major from Mechanical Engineering to Environmental Studies. Congratulations!

As we discussed, I think this major is a great fit for you based on your interest in alternative energy and sustainability issues, and your strong performance in your science classes to date.

Are you familiar with the **career services office**? I recommend you visit them to learn more about opportunities in the field of sustainability. If you are interested, **let me know before the end of May and I can put you in touch with one of my colleagues who is a career counselor there.**
Building Relationship with Today’s Students through Effective Communication Strategies

Nadège Alexandre & Karen Nordstrom
University of Vermont
Tina Balser, Megan McCauley & Jordan Parshall
University of Missouri

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Effective Communication

In person, one on one or small group advising
Online and electronic advising

Mindful Communication

Mindful Speech
Intentional – Truthful
Purposeful - Helpful
Compassionate - Kindness

Growth and Development

Student development
How students grow and change during college

Theories Related to Advising

Psychosocial
Arthur Chickering
Identity Development

Cognitive Development
William Perry
Think, Reason and Make Meaning

Moral Development
Lawrence Kohlberg
Moral Code

Integrative Learning
Marc Lowenstein
Advising

Theory of Advising as Integrative Learning

Advising is an academic endeavor. Its purpose is specific to the institution.
Advising enhances learning.
Learning is integrative and helps students make meaning out of their experience.
Student must be active (rather than passive) participant.
Advising is transformative. Not transactional.
Advising is central to achieving the goals of any college or university.

Marc Lowenstein (2014)
Relational Competencies

- Facilitate Decision Making
- Personal Advising Philosophy
- Create Rapport and Build Relationships
- Conduct Successful Advising Interactions
- Promote Student Understanding
- Communicate in an Inclusive Manner

Academic Advising Core Competencies Model (2017)

Advising Approaches

- Prescriptive
- Learning Centered
- Developmental/Holistic

Developmental Advising Model

- Appreciative Inquiry for engagement and positive outcomes
- Positive communication frameworks to enhance language
- Developing Emotional Intelligence for healthy advisee relationships

Appreciative Advising

“...designed to assist all students...to find what is the best of what was and what can be, through a positive interaction with an academic advisor.”

(Truschel, 2008)

Appreciative Inquiry

A philosophical approach to organizational change

(Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)

Six Phases of Appreciative Advising

- Don’t Settle
- Disarm
- Discover
- Deliver
- Design
- Dream

We “see” the wholeness of the human system and “inquire” into that system’s strengths, possibilities, and successes

(Stavros, Godwin & Cooperrider, 2015)
Appreciative Advising

Phase One

Disarm

Build trust and rapport

---

Appreciative Advising

Phase Two

Discover

Uncover your students’ strengths and skills

---

Appreciative Advising

Phase Three

Dream

Encourage, and be inspired by, students’ stories and dreams

---

Appreciative Advising

Phase Four

Design

Co-construct action plans with your students

---

Appreciative Advising

Phase Five

Deliver

Support your students as they carry out plans

---

Appreciative Advising

Phase Six

Don’t Settle

Challenge yourself and your students to do and become even better
Appreciative Advising Skills

- Question and inquiry
- Understand ethics
- Cultivate cultural competency
- Focus on wellness

“Sociocultural Competency Training” by queensu is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Appreciative Advising: A Wellness Model

Language and conversation centers:
- Positive emotions
- Well-being
- Empowerment
- Intentional
- Culturally appropriate

Emotional Intelligence

Self-Awareness
Understanding and observing your feelings – looking inward
"Knowing one’s internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions.”
(Daniel Goleman, 1998)

Self-Management
Taking responsibility of your own behavior and well-being
(Travis Bradbury, 2009)

Social-Awareness
Recognizing and understanding the feelings of your students and how you react to them

Relationship-Management
Connecting with your students in a way that helps them feel understood and supported

EQ Practice

Self-awareness
Practice being aware of your feelings (good or bad), observe them but do not react to them

Self-management
Practice delaying reaction to difficult situations

Social-awareness
Practice doing things that enrich your personal life to approach others with calmness and receptivity

Relationship-management
Be present and speak from the heart
What Generative Questions Can Do
- Elicit information, stories, ideas, and perspectives
- Tap experience
- Allow strengths to show up
- Show us best practices and elements of success
- Move toward solutions or to information and data that inform possible solutions
- Identify new ways of thinking, new possibilities, opportunities, and aspirations
- Inform what we might do, the results we might want
- Make room for new knowledge, creativity, and innovation
- Deepen connections
- Strengthen relationships
- Engage those on the sidelines
- Generate Understanding

Appreciative Tone
- builds on strengths rather than focuses on problems
- focuses on differences that people bring
- inspires forward movement and positive action
- non-directional
- Intentionality is key!

AA: A Communication Model
- Reciprocal
  - Both student and advisor benefit and learn
- Synergistic
  - Content goes beyond academic advising to build relationships between student and advisor
- Transformational
  - Great potential to change the perspectives of both the student and the advisor

Communication Framework (Luntz, 2007)
- Simplicity: Keep it simple
- Consistency: Be credible and consistent
- Positivity: Personal language, Language and value, Listen to your voice, Creativity and metaphors

Application
- Finding Supportive Colleagues
- Student Communication Myths
- Campus-specific supporting research
- Creating your student-centered communication plan

"Students don't read email"

Fact or Myth?
"Students have more important things to worry about"
Fact or Myth?

"I don't have time to craft pretty emails"
Fact or Myth?

What's Next
We can't say "we aren't effective" and leave it at that
Email is our microphone
*NOW more than ever

Technology fatigue OH MY!

AdZou Project
* How can we better communicate with students to lead to success in their college journey and, ultimately, graduation?

AdZou Project
* Survey of freshmen and transfer students (18-24 age)
Questions Asked:
  • Did students feel valued when they received a mass email?
  • Were emails easy to read?
  • Were students inclined to take action?
AdZou Feedback

"I want to be informed of information relative to my degree or department (such as related events, classes, class cancellations, internship opportunities, etc.) through email. I also want to be informed of resources that I have using missouri.edu."

Early Alert Outreach and Impact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2020</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manual Flags Raised</td>
<td>8,165</td>
<td>10,920</td>
<td>+33.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual Flags Cleared</td>
<td>1,295</td>
<td>2,571</td>
<td>+98.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of flags Cleared</td>
<td>15.86%</td>
<td>23.54%</td>
<td>+48.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Email Best Practices

1. Personalized
2. Readable language
3. Call to action
5. Timely
6. Relevant

Track Outcomes

- What was your goal?
- What did you want the student to do?
- How many students acted?
- Benchmark previous years, if known, or start now!
- Review and revise.

Planning Your Message

Worksheet: Student Communications Audit

Purpose of the Tool
This worksheet will help you identify common anxieties that prevent students from understanding and acting on events from the university. It's designed as a group or independent activity to ensure student-focused communications.

Why? Identify the purpose of the message. What is it meant to teach the student or get them to do?

Who? Identify the target for your message.

When? Also the date and time for your message.
### Planning Your Message

**Worksheet: Student Communications Audit**

**Purpose of the Tool**
Use worksheet and help you identify common issues that prevent students from understanding and acting on emails from the university. It's designed as a group or independent activity to ensure effective student communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why? Identify the purpose of the message: What is it meant to teach the student or get them to do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email all students eligible to enroll or email students based on when their enrollment opens.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why? Identify the target for your message.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When? Plan the date and time for your message.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Planning Your Message**

### What do you send and when?

- **Timing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Semester Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>End of 1st week:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Last day to drop a class email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 3-4:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Probation registration hold email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 5-6:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grad Plan registration hold email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 7-8:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Registration time email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 12-14:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not enrolled for next semester email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### What else?

- Email
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Texting
- What else?

---

**Aiming for Readability**

Do your students have holds preventing them from registering? Give easy step-by-step instructions for clearing their holds. Use words they’ll know, no matter who they are or what their background is.

**Identifying in the Message**

- Students poorer in English speak Español.
- Comments after the main point:
  - Need to clear the hold.
  - Move on to registration.
  - This is the last day.

---

**Planning Your Message**

### mediums used

- Email
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Texting
Planning Your Message

What do you send and when?

- Timing
- Mediums Used
- Content

Sample Semester Timeline

End of 1st week:
Last day to drop a class email
Week 3-4:
Probation registration hold email
Week 5-6:
Grad Plan registration hold email
Week 7-8:
Registration time email
Week 12-14:
Not enrolled for next semester email

Send the right message, at the right time, to the right students.