

Q&A Session for Creating Successful Online Student Service Programs Session #1: Online Advising, Career Advising, Tutoring, and Personal Counseling

Date: November 3, 2005

Q: Is Walden live, or time delayed?

A: A student at Walden will experience both asynchronous and synchronous interactions. The classes themselves are largely asynchronous; however, most programs also require some face-to-face, synchronous interactions. These interactions may include academic residencies (largely for Ph.D. programs), classroom observations, internships, practicum, etc.

Q: What is the difference between the concierge and an actual advisor?

A: An online concierge could be an actual advisor. Some schools have an online advisor (or set of online advisors) who work with online students, while the other advisors work with on-campus students. However, some schools (like Walden) have online concierges and actual advisors. The advisors help the students outside of the classroom. They help the student orient themselves to the university, navigate their program, and ultimately graduate from the institution. The online concierge, on the other hand, works with the students inside the classroom. This person responds to the technical, policy, and procedure questions and helps the student with everyday, non-academic issues. This allows the faculty member to focus on academic issues and teaching.

Q: What software products can be used to deploy an online catalog in this manner?

A: There are two options for institutions. First, the institution can decide to outsource the development of their interactive online catalog. CollegeNet is one such company and there are a few other quality companies. The second option would be to create the interactive catalog on your own. Creating the interactive catalog is no different than creating an effective website. The institution would need to have web-development software, such as Dreamweaver, ColdFusion, FrontPage, etc. A webmaster can then work with the people who produce the catalog to insure that the various pieces of information are presented in the correct way.

Q: Does DARS interface with DataTel? What is the cost of this system?

A: Yes. My understanding is that DARS can interface with any student system (DataTel, Banner, PeopleSoft, etc). The best place to find information about cost is on the DARS page at Miami University, Ohio. The page is <http://www.dars.muohio.edu/interest/index.htm>

Q: For institutions with online advising, what times of day are students more likely to seek online academic advisement?

A: From my experience, students utilizing online advising will seek it out at all times. If the service is available during the evening or night, they will access it. This is especially true if your institution has students all around the world. The more students you have outside of your local area, the more likely the

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students will use online advising (or all online services, for that matter). Obviously it would be difficult to staff online advising 24/7, which is why it is so important to create an asynchronous online advising center. This center would include advising materials, discussion boards, blogs, and other important advising tools. The institution could also allow students to schedule one-on-one appointments based on individual need. If the student is located in China, the advising office could work with that student to provide synchronous advising when it is convenient for the student. This service wouldn't have to be open to all students; rather it would be open just for those students who are unable to attend an advising session during the posted hours of operation.

Q: Can you further explain what you meant by "traditional students are becoming non-traditional"

A: As mentioned, traditional students are typically considered aged 18-24. This group is getting smaller in percentage compared to those over 25 or under 18. This means that more older students are coming back to school to finish their degrees, start their degrees, or to improve their skills, while more younger students (under 18) are enrolling in colleges and universities to supplement their high school courses.

So, traditional students are actually becoming the minority (less than 50%) at some colleges making them the non-traditional students. Meanwhile, non-traditional students are ever increasing in numbers at some institutions, thereby giving them a majority and making them the traditional students.

Q: How can an institution comply with FERPA and still be responsive to "online" requests for information.

A: The best way to comply with FERPA is to first define an electronic signature. Most institutions define an electronic signature as a username and a password. The username is institution assigned and the password is user-defined. Once an electronic signature is in place, then the institution should place all advising information, chats, discussions boards, and synchronous virtual chats on pages that cannot be accessed without a username and password. By requiring the student to log in, institutions are able to comply with FERPA because the log in information acts as student identification and verification.

Q: Does the self-appointment work for multiple advisors?

A: I have not seen the online calendar work for multiple advisors, but that does not mean it cannot be done. The online calendar I demonstrated only allowed the student to set up an advising session with one advisor at a time. If the online calendar is linked to a program like Outlook, it would seem possible to set up appointments with multiple advisors because the Outlook calendar allows a person to set up meetings with multiple people at one time. Therefore, while I have not seen it done, I am sure that with the right programming, students would be able to set up appointments with multiple advisors.

Q: Have there been security concerns regarding the posting of pictures and bios on-line? My staff has removed their picture because of security issues.

A: The benefit of posting pictures and bios online is that it allows the student to put a face and a story with a name. This may help students feel more comfortable talking with a staff member over the phone or online. However, the drawback is that some people may use the pictures to identify a staff or faculty

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member. Once identified, that person could target, harass, or stalk the staff or faculty member. However, this sort of behavior could also be triggered by seeing the staff or faculty member on-campus. I believe the potential positives outweigh the potential negatives.

Q: For institutions that offer evening advising, do institutes provide a computer for the employee to work from home?

A: If an institution requires an employee to conduct online advising in the evening, then it should be the institution's obligation to provide the technology (internet, computer, etc) that would enable that employee to do their job (in this case, provide online advising from home).

Q: How do institutions address concerns like "online interactions aren't as good as face-to-face"?

A: I would approach this two ways. First, I would not force any one student into a particular mode of advising. Not all students want to meet with an advisor face-to-face (for a variety of reasons). Some students simply prefer to interact virtually. Second, I would promote the virtual advising with fellow student testimonials. Students who have a positive experience can often times influence many other students to utilize a particular tool or service. This means that if one student really enjoyed their virtual advising session, they typically will be willing to tell others about their experience.

The best way to address these concerns is to be truthful and up-front. This allows students to self-select and decide what mode would be more comfortable for them.

Q: What products are available and recommended for interactive advising?

A: Many schools build their own interactive advising tools. Discussion boards, blogs, and listservs are all tools that can be built in-house and maintained by advisors and IT staff. However, there are companies that sell secure chat software and software to manage incoming communications. One of these companies is RightNow. This company offers a great tool to help institutions manage their knowledge while acting as an excellent information resource for students. Some institutions also choose to use open-source software. This allows the institution to utilize software and adapt or expand it for their own individual needs. If you want more information about open-source software, look on Wikipedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source.

Q: When you speak of online advising is it synchronous or asynchronous

A: When I am speaking of true online advising, I am speaking about synchronous. Synchronous advising allows the student to interact with the advisor real-time, as if they were interacting with the advisor face-to-face or over the phone. Asynchronous advising does occur online as well. Asynchronous advising can be in the form of discussion forums, FAQ's, advising materials, or email.

Q: With an online catalog, do emails go out when policy or other changes are made?

A: Yes. Whenever a policy or procedure was changed at Walden, an email would be sent to everyone at

the university (faculty, staff, and students).

Q: Is advising via email sufficient?

A: The answer depends on your student needs. If there is a group of students who are not satisfied by accessing advising in person, email advising is another opportunity for students to connect to the institution. However, email is asynchronous, so there might still be a group of students who do not want to interact with an advisor in-person but still want to interact real-time. In this case, virtual chat, instant messaging or text messaging are options for these students to access advising. Again, it depends on your student needs. Therefore, each institution must assess student needs and provide services based on those needs.

Q: With CAS, are only member catalogs available? Or do they include all institutions?

A: CAS is a tool available to any student who signs onto CAS. Once signed onto CAS, the student is able to look at any institution that is a CAS institution. In order to become a CAS institution, that institution must purchase the software from the University of Miami, Ohio. In our system of 32 schools (MnSCU), all schools have CAS, so all students within the system can access CAS at any other school in the system. This feature is the primary reason we decided to purchase CAS at a system level as opposed to an institution level. For more information, please look online at: <http://www.dars.muohio.edu/>.

Q: Can the CAS system evaluate international transcripts? Can DARS interface with POISE?

A: CAS is based on rules built into DARS. If an institution has defined equivalencies for courses coming from an international institution, then yes, CAS can evaluate international transcripts. When we receive a transcript from an international school with undefined equivalencies, we first evaluate that transcript and then build the rules into DARS. CAS will then interpret those rules and will show those rules to all future students from that particular international institution.

Regarding DARS, my understanding is that it can interact with any homegrown or proprietary student database. The DARS developers work with an institution's IT staff to insure that its student database will interact with DARS. For instance, our student database is homegrown, but it utilizes Oracle. Because Oracle is a DARS partner, we were able to utilize DARS at our campus.

Q: What information is available regarding how on-line advising might be assessed relative to traditional advising?

A: I have not seen any information about how one mode of advising compares to another, however, assessment is something that is done institution by institution. This means that each institution striving for continuous improvement would continually assess both online and traditional advising. Because student populations differ by each institution, only assessment done at the institution level can really inform that institution about both its online and traditional advising.

In terms of conducting the assessment, my advice is to insure that the assessments of online advising and traditional advising to not differ significantly. If the two assessments are similar, then the institution can

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draw meaningful comparisons and conclusions.

Q: Is any kind of screening criteria used for making on-line appointments?

A: The primary screening criterion is the student's log-in information. This insures that only students utilize advising appointments. Once logged in, the student can identify what type of advising (career, academic, personal, etc) they need from a drop-down box or from a bulleted list.

Q: Have you seen sites that allow for the downloading of catalog information to CD or DVD by the end user?

A: Any institution that presents their catalogs in .pdf format can allow their end-users to download a catalog to their computer hard drive, zip drive, CD, DVD, or flash drive. For instance, if you go to the University of Minnesota (<http://www.catalogs.umn.edu/archive/tcarchive.html>), you will see a large number of .pdf documents of past catalogs. If the end-user right clicks on the link to the .pdf document, they are able to save that document to disk (including CD and DVD).

Q: Do you have an opinion on Datatel's electronic advising suite?

A: I do not have an opinion. When I was still with Walden University, we just implemented Datatel. At the same time, we implemented the advising suite. Because I did not stay at Walden long after implementation, I do not have an opinion one-way or another. That said, based on what Datatel told us what the advising suite would do and based on what some of my former colleagues have said the suite is doing, it sounds like the advising suite is a powerful tool for the institution.

Q: How can I obtain a presentation guide or handout to follow along and use later today?

A: I believe the presentation will be (or has been) posted to the Academic Impressions' website. If you cannot find it, please contact Patricia Sandler at patricia@academicimpressions.com.

Colleen Cook - 12:45 pm

Q: Have you heard of Continuity and what's your opinion of it?

A: I have not heard of Continuity. I am willing to look into it further if you provide me a weblink to its homepage. If interested, please send me an email at lpirius@inverhills.edu.

Q: Are you aware of any colleges that have shared or might be willing to share some of these online advising resources?

A: My suspicion is that many colleges are willing to allow your institutions to link out to their resources. A perfect example is how Weber State links directly to Chemeketa Community College (<http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>). I believe that most colleges and universities that develop good resources are more than willing to share that information with others as long as they are given credit

for their work.

Q: Landon, do you have any examples of interactive websites on the subj. of student accts? (i.e. tuition fees, policies, etc)

A: There are many good interactive websites regarding tuition, fees, payment, etc. I will list a couple here, but the problem is that you will not be able to get very far. Most student account sites are password protected because financial information is protected information. That said, you may be able to contact the institution for a test account to see what the site includes. The best site I have seen is the University of Minnesota One-Stop (<http://onestop.umn.edu/>). Just click on "Tuition and Billing," but do look at the rest of the site. It is very comprehensive and is highly acclaimed. A couple other sites of quality are:

- <http://www.ou.edu/bursar>
 - <http://www.virginia.edu/studentaccounts/>
 - <http://www.plattsburgh.edu/offices/admin/bursar/>
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Q: If student relies on online policy/procedures and acts on that info, then the college changes that policy... how does one know what was in effect at a particular moment?

A: This is the tricky issue for colleges and universities. It is absolutely essential that there is an effective means of communication in place prior to attempting to build dynamic policies and procedures. In the case of Walden University (as I mentioned in the presentation), email was the official means of communication. Anytime a policy or procedure was to be changed, an email was sent to all students, staff, and faculty. Messages were also posted in the online classrooms. In addition, students were informed during orientation that policies and procedures could change. In a sense, the institution bombarded students with the information. Without email as the official means of communication, I believe it would be impossible to create dynamic policies and procedures. My own institution (Inver Hills) instituted email as the official means of communication this current semester. We currently have about 80% of our students using email. Until we get 100% of our students using our institution assigned email, we will not move towards a dynamic catalog. However, we are already planning for it now and we are taking dramatic steps to connect students to their institution-assigned email.

Q: do you have any "metrics" on how well those sites with on-line advising are received and utilized by the actual students?

A: My evidence is primarily anecdotal, which carries only so much weight. That does not mean the institutions I mentioned in my study do not have quantitative or qualitative data regarding their online advising. Regarding institutions for which I have worked, every online service was assessed. We set up 3-year assessment plans at MSU, Mankato and we are in the process of setting up a 3-year assessment plan at Inver Hills. My suggestion is to rely on anecdotal information and actual data from other schools when deciding whether to bring up a particular online service. In addition, be sure to set up an assessment plan in advance so you can monitor the successes/failures of the particular online service and make adjustments as necessary.

Q: How do you ensure that the advising session is secure? Do you use particular software?

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A: Most secure advising sites use SSL, which stands for "Secure Socket Layer." This allows our students to submit sensitive information (username and password) in an encrypted manner. This encrypted data is very hard to crack, which is why companies like Amazon and other online shopping sites use the software. Once the information is submitted and the user is logged in, the site can be locked down so confidential discussions cannot be accessed.

Q: Are virtual advising site, typically created, supported and maintained by IT staff or by the advising unit?

A: At Inver Hills, the advising site is created and maintained by our advising unit, but our college IT functions are decentralized. Many colleges and universities have a centralized IT function, so the advising sites are maintained by the IT department. At MSU, Mankato, our centralized IT department was responsible for all of the website development, but they expected the advising staff to provide content. I would say that the centralized approach is more common than the decentralized approach.

Q: Do the Job Search Assistants work for students that do live within that campus's state?

A: If the Job Search Assistant is employed by the college or university, they work for all students of that institution regardless of where the student is located. This means that if your institution has Job Search Assistants and also students who live around the world, those students would receive job search assistance. I believe that if an institution provides a service to one group of students, it must provide that same service (or an equivalent) to all of its students.

Q: How do you monitor the integrity of the third party in tutoring in terms of the quality of the service?

A: Once an institution decides to outsource a particular service such as tutoring to a third-party vendor, that institution is essentially placing some trust in the third-party vendor. This is why it is so important to conduct a thorough screening of third-party vendor before purchasing a service. When Inver Hills purchased Smarthinking, we examined a number of third-party tutoring vendors. We also talked to other institutions that had previously purchased Smarthinking. Based on this information, we decided to move forward. We do plan to survey our students periodically to determine whether they find the service useful. In addition, we plan to track students (anonymously) who have used Smarthinking and see if there was any improvement in their coursework. Again, this information would be aggregate as opposed to individual.

Q: Do you/has there been any tracking to see how often the on-line tutoring site is used at your institution.

A: Please see the answer to the previous question. In addition to tracking student satisfaction and student success, we plan also track student use (in hours). Our sister institution (Lake Superior College) has had Smarthinking for approximately 3 years and they have conducted surveys and assessments and found that use has increased, as has student satisfaction and success.

Q: Will DARS work in conjunction with Desire 2 Learn LMS?

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A: I have not seen DARS working in conjunction with any LMS vendor, including Desire2Learn (we have Desire2Learn as well). I believe that you could place links to DARS from D2L, but there is no real interaction. Nonetheless, I certainly envision increased interaction between LMS products and other education products such as DARS and CAS. If you are interested in DARS, I would ask the vendor if they have seen any examples of the two pieces of software interacting.

Q: How do schools train and pay online tutors?

A: In the case of third-party vendors (like Smarthinking), the training is done by the company. In the case of homegrown tutoring services, the training is done by the institution. We had some online tutors in place prior to purchasing Smarthinking. These tutors were trained just like any other tutor (often times they were retired or retiring faculty), but we also added technology components to their training. The technology pieces included email, specific software tools, and courseware products (D2L, BlackBoard, WebCT, etc.). The biggest piece to consider when training online tutors is the technology piece. A tutor may be excellent face-to-face, but may be completely ineffective online. Therefore, they must be trained to interact and provide tutoring assistance with technological tools.

Q: How do you financially support 24/7 counseling?

A: Our institution does not. We support 8:00am to 7:00pm counseling. After hours, the student can utilize online advising materials or “Ask a Counselor.” “Ask a Counselor” allows the student to submit any question they have and receive a response within 24 hours. We are, however, looking at purchasing RightNow technology, which will allow us to provide better service 24/7, albeit not live service. We are also considering expanding hours of operation or placing counselors on call during the evenings or on weekends. We are not a large institution, so we cannot afford to offer 24/7 coverage. However, we are trying to place all counseling materials online as well as incorporating an incident resolution product (RightNow). Some bigger schools may be able to offer 24/7 coverage by shifting employee hours to cover all times of day and all days of the week. This is a big step financially, so I would suggest taking small steps by slowly increasing hours of operation and by utilizing technology to better manage student inquiries.

Q: Can we get a copy of your presentation, many of the websites were shown quickly and we were unable to write them down.

A: I believe the presentation will be (or has been) posted to the Academic Impressions’ website. If you cannot find it, please contact Patricia Sandler at patricia@academicimpressions.com.

Q: How do you resolve the issues associated with math symbols that are not available on the keyboard?

A: If you are talking about online tutoring, Smarthinking has math symbols built into its tutoring whiteboard. Many courseware products (D2L, BlackBoard, WebCT, etc) also have math symbols built into their environments.

Q: For online career services, what is the student to staff ratio?

A: I think this largely depends on the type of institution. If your institution is involved in career related programs (nursing, technical trades, legal, medical, etc), the ratio is probably lower. If your institution is involved with more liberal arts and preparing your students to move onto another college or university is probably higher (with more money spent on advisors/counselors). Our college is a good example of the latter. Our primary focus is helping students prepare to move onto a four year school. Therefore, we have 8 counselors who work with approximately 5000 students; whereas we only have 2 people working in the career service area.

Q: Please explain how one can tutor for math online?

A: In the case of Smarthinking, math tutoring is done on a whiteboard. The student enters the tutoring center with a math tutor and a whiteboard is present. The student is allowed to enter symbols, text, and other information. In addition, they are allowed to draw pictures on the whiteboard. The tutor and student may be talking on the phone or they may be instant messaging. Once the student has written their question on the whiteboard, the tutor can show the student step-by-step how to solve the math problem.

Q: How did you move the face-to-face tutoring practice to online? Not necessarily getting starting with a tutoring program but rather moving the organization to an online tutoring philosophy.

A: Great question because we are in the process of doing this now. We are purposely targeting students and faculty as we advertise the new service. We target students with mailings, emails, newspaper articles, and website updates. This is done to try and make every student aware of the new service. We target faculty much the same way, but we target them because they are critical to the success of our new online service. If faculty do not recommend or encourage students to use the online tutoring service, the students are unlikely to use the new service. We also made sure that both students and faculty were aware that on-campus tutoring still existed. This way, leery students and faculty could still use on-campus tutoring until they became more comfortable with online tutoring.

Q: do you have any statistics on what percentage of students these on-line services?

A: This depends largely on the institution and on the service. For instance, we have nearly 95% of our students using online registration and we have 100% of our faculty using online grading. However, some of our other services like tutoring, advising, etc are less used at this point in time. Our expectation is that these services will become more popular in the future and we will see the percentages go up. We monitor use on a semesterly basis and I would recommend that all institutions set up a similar monitoring plan.

Q: How are online student services evaluated by students?

A: Our online services (and all services for that matter) are assessed through surveys and focus groups. We are in the process of finalizing a new 3-year assessment plan that will incorporate surveys and focus groups for nearly all of our primary service areas (registrar, bursar, financial aid, advising, etc). Each year, about 3-4 areas will conduct surveys and hold focus groups to get input from students. The services that assess the first year would not assess again until the fourth year. The first year would be used to set baseline data and then the subsequent assessments would compare data from the first year with that of the

subsequent years.

Q: How do we address licensing issues from state to state (counselor & student in different states)?

A: A licensed counselor is able to practice counseling within the state in which they are licensed. If that counselor is advising students from different states in an online environment, but are doing so from their licensing state, I do not see a problem. I would check with your individual state to determine its own licensing requirements and guidelines.

Q: How do you provide online writing tutoring without simply giving them the answers? i.e. proofreading

A: The tutoring provided by Smarthinking does not provide the actual answers to the questions. They provide examples that are similar to the question posed by the student. This eliminates the possibility of a student copying and pasting the tutor's answer into their homework or test. In terms of writing tutoring, the tutors provide information about sentence structure, grammar, etc. The writing center director at Walden University corrects the first couple pages of a student's work and points out trends (grammar, etc). Then he explains this to the student and forces the student to check the rest of their work.

Q: Knowing that email communications are part of a student record, how do you safeguard the student's privacy?

A: We have a dual system for advising. If the advising material is academic in nature, the counselor attaches the email communication to the student's record. If the email communication is personal in nature, then the counselor maintains a separate file for the student. If a student's record is requested by an outside entity (assuming the student approves the release), the personal communication is not included. The personal communication is not used for anything but counseling the student.

Q: Do counselors first verify access to emergency mental health services b/4 proceeding w/ online counseling? (e.g. distance ed students in another community?)

A: Our counselors first verify that services are available before posting them on the website or referring students to that service. The service list is then updated periodically to assure accuracy and availability.

Q: Do you not think generation x y and z will be demanding online personal counseling? Say within five years? And how will we as a society address what they are demanding?

A: Individuals from generations prior to generations x, y, and z will also be asking for online personal counseling because there is a greater sense of confidentiality. I think the perception is that if you do not have to show your face, counseling can be more objective and confidential. Therefore, I believe that generations that are more comfortable interacting online will expect that personal counseling services will also be available online. As institutions, we need to be prepared for the possibility of this demand. If we are unable to meet the demand of these individuals, then they will either find an outside service that will or they will transfer to an institution that does provide this service. While we may not have a demand for online personal counseling now, we need to be aware that the demand for such a service might increase

and we need to plan accordingly.

Q: How do institutions monitor for crises situations on a 24/7 site and manage liability issues?

A: It is likely impossible for an individual institution to monitor potential crisis situations on a 24/7 basis. Therefore, institutions need to post links to crisis hotlines and other outside agencies on their websites. In this sense, the institution is able to insure that the student has access to 24/7 crisis services even though those services are not offered by the institution itself.

Q: Any ideas how to develop online services using Blackboard?

A: Some institutions are building portals and unions in courseware environments, such as BlackBoard. Students are given access to this portal or union when they begin their academic journey. The services available within these course environments include advising, financial aid, registration, career services, tutoring, residential life, etc. The more important thing to remember is that if you offer online services through BlackBoard to some students, you should provide those services to all students.