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Report on Advising for Distance Students for Becky Copper Glenz, Dean of the College of Extended Learning

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Report for Becky Copper Glenz, Dean of the College of Extended Learning

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to do an aspirational study of advising for our students in the College of Extended Learning. The following includes a document from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) which outlines best practices for distance advising, a brief literature review, the results of a survey of some of our AOS, Nursing, and Dental Hygiene students and the transcription of a conversation with a handful of academic advisors recently returned from a conference on academic advising for distance students.

Excerpts from NACADA's Distance Advising Strategies (Varney):

What is Distance advising?

Distance advising is described as being able to offer a minimum set of core services relating to academic advising which assist distance learners in identifying and achieving their maximum educational potential. The institutional philosophy of a distance advising support services program must be to strive **to respond to learner needs rather than the learner adjusting to an institution's established organizational structure** (NACADA, 1999).

Challenges to advising at a distance

"Adults, perhaps more than any other student population need someone within the institution who cares" (Bland, 2003, p. 1). **The primary challenge when advising from a distance is connecting with the student in such a way that he or she identifies the advisor as the person within the institution who cares.** In face-to-face advising, this is accomplished through interpersonal communication; this level of care and connection is a more difficult to convey from a distance. Alternative strategies and tools need to be examined to help students feel connected to their institutions, promote student persistence and increase graduation rates (Luna & Medina, 2007).

Strategies for distance advising success

Kuh, Kinzie and Schuh and associates (2005) noted that "advising is viewed as a way to connect students to the campus and help them feel that someone is looking out for them" (p. 214)." Sizoo, Agrusa and Iskat (2005) observe that one of the features that adult learners find attractive in higher learning organizations is the ability to make connections with both other students and staff. One of the most important strategies for success in distance advising is to build relationships with students wherever they are. Bland (2003) observes that "every individual is unique, and the advisor's recognition of that student's personal attributes and life situations can strengthen the relationship" (p. 8). The goal of a distance advising program should be to **replicate the intimacy of a face-to-face** advisor-student relationship from a distance.

There are several strategies advisors may use to develop a strong relationship with students. One is to begin the relationship from the student's initial contact with the school. Advisors who are involved in the admissions process -- whether to discuss program specifics or potential careers post-graduation -- make connections with students early in the student's academic career. Distance education adult students, in particular, are concerned with the quality of advising and other services and how closely these services replicate those

offered on campus (Luna & Medina, 2007). An easy way to convey a sense of availability and concern for students at a distance is **to end every email with an offer from the advisor to call the student if it is more convenient or would better convey the information** (Luna & Medina, 2007). Another way to build meaningful connections with students early in their academic careers is to offer a **comprehensive orientation that includes an explanation of systems**, technology, planning sheets and anything else students need to know in order to be successful. Hartman (2008) suggests that a retention strategy for adult learners is to create online orientations for students and faculty, as well as creating an online master schedule. Easily accessible, user friendly orientations let students access information whenever their schedules allow. Podcast video explanations of planning sheets and other potentially confusing tools may be uploaded to the student community system.

Another strategy distance advisors may use to build and solidify relationships with students is to develop and **utilize some type of early warning system to identify students at risk**. Hartman (2008) suggests that one strategy for retaining online students is to improve systems for tracking at risk online students. Early reach out to these students may both improve their academic performance and increase their persistence rates. Connecting with these students may also improve student engagement, particularly when the faculty member is involved in the conversations about student performance (Hartman, 2008), as well as help get the student back on track by providing a support network that adult students find attractive (Wasley, 2007, Sizoo, Agrusa & Iskat, 2005, Hartman, 2008). Online tutoring is also an effective tool to help distance students both alleviate concern they might feel before taking difficult courses like math or accounting, and improve their academic success. If tutoring is not available through the school, outsourced programs such as Smart thinking enable schools to offer valuable services to students.

A third strategy for effective distance advising is to be as proactive as possible with student questions and concerns. **Try to anticipate student questions by keeping track of commonly asked questions and include information on these frequently asked topics or important information** (such as graduation deadlines) in the signature section of the email. Investigate other methods for communicating with students. Use the phone whenever possible, but when that is not practical, consider communicating either via Skype or Facebook®.

Keep track of students and outreach to them at various checkpoints:

- Have new students registered for the next term?
- Do they know about a class coming up that they need to take before the rest of the course sequence is offered?
- How are they handling the technological learning curve?
- Would they benefit from the advisor logging into the class with them and helping them navigate the online course environment?
- What about empowerment: how much latitude do advisors have in shepherding students through their education?
- If a student begins a course and finds it is too difficult, is the advisor able to change the student's enrollment to another course?
- How connected is the advisor to the department chairs, and how accessible are the chairs to students?

Vincent Tinto is the guru of student retention. He (1987) argues that academic advising is the very core of successful institutional efforts to educate and retain students. His research emphasizes the importance of student engagement in their educational journey. A recent speech he gave emphasized the role of assessment: “Retention programs have to provide empirical evidence that resources committed to them are an investment that yields long-term funding benefits.” Whatever plan of action the CEL embarks on, it should include an integral and ongoing system of assessment. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) ethics code, in statement 3.21 commits student affairs professionals to “evaluate programs, services, and organizational structure regularly and systematically to assure conformity to published standards and guidelines. (APCA, 2006). The following literature review gives a brief overview of the nature of online students, the evidence about the importance of knowledgeable and caring advising, and ideas to be considered for the advising services for our distance students.

Pullen, in 2009, noted that digital literacy, connectivity and immediacy are paramount descriptors for online students. Whether the class is online or on-campus, millennial students expect support services to be available anytime anyplace over the Internet. (Pullen, 2009-2010). Why do students take online classes? One study in 2005 reported the following: “to accommodate work schedules (72.6 percent), followed, in order, by family obligations (42.3 percent), live too far (42.1 percent), prefer distance education (24.7 percent), financial (16 percent), other (12.8 percent), course not available on campus (4.2 percent), and on campus section full (2.8 percent)” (Dare, Zapata, & Thomas, 2005). These are busy people with multiple responsibilities. “Respondents managed a mean of six roles in addition to being students” (Cragg, Andrusyszyn, & Fraser, 2005).

“Four decades of research about student persistence consistently point to three critical elements: the value of connecting students early on to the institution through learning support systems (tutoring and supplemental instruction programs, for example), first-year programming (learning communities and first-year seminars), and solid academic advising, with advising positioned squarely as the vital link in this retention

equation” (Drake, 2011). Advising is critical when a college degree requires careful planning, after discerning prerequisites; major/minor and graduation requirements can be mindfully planned when understood. And just like a child, a community is needed to support the student. Distance students can feel the lack of community. “Isolation can result in frustration directed at courses, the institution, and the entire experience, and can be especially problematic when students cannot readily find or get answers to their questions. This isolation can hinder the student’s performance academically and can subsequently lead to withdrawal from the institution. Students, through advising, have the potential to feel better connected to their institution, and as a result, institutions need to explore how advising is factored into the overall program experience” (Morris, 2007). A study done in Florida of over 300 online students revealed that *academic advising functions were* two of the top five needed and valued services. The need was articulated as “*clear, complete, and timely information regarding curriculum requirements*. Without solid academic advising services, online degree seekers inevitably flounder at some point during their distance education experience” (Raphael, 2006).

McCracken (2005) wrote that people must be at the heart of the enterprise “Student characteristics should be the ultimate force motivating the development of support services.” “Institutional priorities must focus upon students as the center of instructional, technological, and support expansion initiatives.” Students must feel cared about and will understand when their success is tangential to the enterprise. Shin (2003) wrote that “An analysis of student survey data indicates that a distance student’s sense of institutional transactional presence predicts all the selected measures to do with success in distance learning.” This transactional presence “refers to the degree to which a distance student perceives the availability of and connectedness with, people in his/her educational setting.” Morrow and Ackermann (2012) found in their study of more than 900 students that “faculty support had a small, but significant positive relationship with intention to persist at the university. Jackson Smith and Hill (2003) also found that faculty warmth was an important factor in students' persistence and retention.

A study at North Carolina State University reported that the “services rated highest in terms of importance to distance learners include registration and records, faculty advising, and libraries.” (Dare, Zapata & Thomas, 2005) Another study linking student success to academic advising wrote, “Academic advisors should seek ways to develop personal relationships with their distance education students. (Curry, Baldwin, & Smith Sharpe, 1998). This is echoed in Bollinger and Fethi in 2012, who created an instrument to measure students’ sense of connectedness because “connectedness is an important aspect in online learning environments because it may potentially affect learners’ levels of motivation and satisfaction.” Dunn, in 2005 had a number of recommendations including formation of a committee of students to make recommendations; a readiness person for distance students to liaise with to determine if the model works for them and exploration of ways of dealing with data security in other student services, particularly phone and email counseling sessions. (Dunn, 2005).

To summarize:

- Distance students have a variety of roles and responsibilities
 - Advising can play a vital role in student success
 - Students expect immediate, available-when-they-are advising
 - The information needs to be clear, concise and coming to them at the right time
 - Advisors are the personal connection/answer to academic isolation of the online student
 - Issues outlined in the literature include questions about data security, recommendations to have ongoing assessment
-

On December 31, 2013 I met with Dental Hygiene Advisor Julie Dittrich and on December 18th I met with Ken Adams, Shirley Murray, Kasi Johnson, and Erin Harley. We started with general issues and the ideas and issues that came from these included:

- Shared expertise... right now a variety of software and people using it, better if everyone was using the same one so they could be trained and help one another with shared practices, documents, etc.
- Shared place (D2L or RightNow by Oracle—software used for MavOneStop) for shared videos/camtasia presentations for FACULTY AND STUDENTS (separate ones, same ones?) that explain how to
 - Read an integrated degree audit
 - Read the bulletin, have the bulletin improved with pre-reqs
 - Register, including how to do the advanced searching capabilities
 - Use U.Select to find equivalencies at other schools
 - use student services that online students can access.
 - Student community, answering questions of one another?
 - Substitutions...Registrar hold on to, Advisor?
 - degree audit? Who can do, how long should it take?
 - Some students want in-person..If so could everyone who would need it be trained on skype or something like it? Compatible software with tablets/IPhones, etc? Some means of mimicking the in person experience?
 - Hours? Big issue. Should advising be available when the student needs it and if so, could a person potentially be trained ENOUGH to be able to answer some/most questions with the proviso that students would have to be referred and wait for the advisor of record for other issues? Downside? Hard to train anyone enough? Upside? Available when the student needs them? Have existing someone scheduled from 5-8?
 - How does advising load work? Equitable? Fairness? Impact on student?

- Is the shared responsibility of the advising work being adequately communicated to the advisee? If not, how could it be? The following software CAN be set up to include this, but message should be conveyed in many places, in many ways, that students are responsible, ultimately, for their own education? Other side of this issue is the comment from one of the students who said she learned as much from her peers. Do we want/intend students advising students? Should we expect that of them? Is that a fundamentally good idea?
- TimeTrade Software. One of the big issues is schedule an appointment (real or phone or skype). TimeTrade software is an overlay for Outlook. Look at Construction Management.
- General comments: students are needy, want stuff immediately? Should we convey to them the limitations as well as the expectations they can legitimately hold?
- Who's responsible for their help when it's for a gen ed class? Some of the students are asking for help from their advisors when they should be asking IT or someone else?

Student Responses. The survey went out to AOS, Dental Hygiene & Nursing students in the CEL on November 19, 2013. I sent out 5 reminders between then and today, December 31, 2013. Sent to 350, responses from 34.

2. Are you a full time (12 credits or more per semester) student?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	5	15%
2	No	29	85%
	Total	34	100%

3. How many semesters have you been in the program you are currently pursuing?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	2 or fewer	14	41%
2	3-4	12	35%
3	5 or more	8	24%
	Total	34	100%

4. Why are you in school?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	To advance in current career	31	91%
2	To change careers	1	3%
3	For personal fulfillment	1	3%
4	Other	1	3%
	Total	34	100%

5. Between the year you started in your current degree, how many years had it been since you were in sc...

#	Answer	Response	%
1	1-3 years	16	50%
2	4-6 years	8	25%
3	7-10	2	6%
4	11-15	3	9%
5	more than 15 years	3	9%
	Total	32	100%

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Male	4	13%
2	Female	25	83%
3	Other/Choose not to disclose	1	3%
	Total	30	100%

Statistic	Value
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7. Besides your school responsibilities, what else are you responsible for?
Check all that apply

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Work less than 40 hours per week	14	44%
2	Work 40 or more hours per week	17	53%
3	Primary responsibilities for children	21	66%
4	Primary responsibilities for aging parents	4	13%
5	Volunteer responsibilities	8	25%
6	Community leadership responsibilities	2	6%

8. When you started this program, how familiar were you with:

Add C

#	Question	not at all	Somewhat	Very Familiar	Total Responses	Mean
1	which of your previous classes transferred	5	10	16	31	2.35
2	how to use the undergraduate bulletin	15	15	2	32	1.59
3	academic policies such as academic warning	7	19	6	32	1.97
4	student services in general	8	20	4	32	1.88
5	registration software	13	12	6	31	1.77
6	job outlook for the career you are pursuing	4	15	13	32	2.28
7	who to contact for academic information	5	15	12	32	2.22
8	how to read your academic record (interactive degree audit)	6	15	11	32	2.16
9	tutoring services	14	15	3	32	1.66
10	library resources	11	16	5	32	1.81
11	program requirements	2	20	10	32	2.25
12	general education & graduation requirements	4	19	9	32	2.16
13	graduation processes	16	14	2	32	1.56
14	financial aid processes	6	16	10	32	2.13



9. Now that you are pursuing this degree, how familiar are you with:

#	Question	not at all	somewhat	Very Familiar	Total Responses	Mean
1	which of your previous classwork transferred	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>23</u>	32	2.72
2	how to use the undergraduate bulletin	<u>6</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>11</u>	32	2.16
3	academic policies such as academic warning	<u>4</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>13</u>	31	2.29
4	student services in general	<u>4</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>10</u>	32	2.19
5	registration software	<u>1</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>17</u>	32	2.50
6	job outlook for the career you are pursuing	<u>2</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>16</u>	32	2.44
7	who to contact for academic information	<u>1</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>20</u>	32	2.59
8	how to read your academic record	<u>1</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>20</u>	32	2.59
9	tutoring services	<u>8</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>8</u>	32	2.00
10	library resources	<u>2</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>17</u>	32	2.47
11	program requirements	<u>0</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>24</u>	32	2.75
12	general education & graduation requirements	<u>0</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>17</u>	32	2.53
13	graduation processes	<u>5</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>9</u>	32	2.13
14	financial aid processes	<u>5</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>15</u>	32	2.31

10. This semester, how often have you been in touch with your academic advisor?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<u>Never</u>	5	16%
2	<u>1-3 times</u>	22	69%
3	<u>4 or more times</u>	5	16%
4	<u>I don't know who my advisor is</u>	0	0%
	Total	32	100%



11. If you do not get academic advice from your advisor, who do you consult?
(yourself, the bulletin, a...

  More... ▾
Add Graph Add Table

Text Response

- [View](#) prior students
- [View](#) a spouse or other advisors
- [View](#) bachelor completion program documents
- [View](#) I do get advice from my advisor.
- [View](#) Bulletin. Only contacted the advisor to clarify a discrepancy between bulletin and graduation audit.
- [View](#) The Bulletin
- [View](#) I have gone with to Laura Schwartz for my questions. She has been the biggest help.
- [View](#) professor in program
- [View](#) Professor in the program, other students
- [View](#) professor
- [View](#) There is a D2L classroom for nursing students to ask general program questions. I've found this to be helpful....more than seeking information frommy advisor.
- [View](#) My current advisor, bulletin and professor have provided good advice.
- [View](#) Head of Dept.
- [View](#) myself

12. In your previous academic experiences, did you use an academic advisor and for what services?

  More... ▾
Add Graph Add Table

Text Response

- [View](#) No
- [View](#) yes, for my Associates Degree and a transfer to MNSU
- [View](#) Yes, to monitor degree progression.
- [View](#) no, I had no idea who my advisor was, or if one had even been assigned to me
- [View](#) Yes, to help determine class load and course planning for future.
- [View](#) I don't quite remember
- [View](#) Yes
- [View](#) No
- [View](#) Yes to ensure I was taking classes to fulfill requirements.
- [View](#) no
- [View](#) Course offering, changes
- [View](#) 25 years ago, when I got my Associates degree in nursing: - The curriculum didn't change in the entire 2 years - You got a piece of paper at the beginning and kept taking classes, you KNEW when your credits fulfilled requirements - You walked into the registrars office and registered for your classes - If the advising counselor was in the office, you could speak with him For Spring semester 2014 -Filled out an intent to enroll form for my 1 class -Teachers available to teach the class changed after I put it in my 'wish list' - Had to email my professor 4 times to get the electronic permission to register - Secretary that was to remove this hold never answered my email for 3 weeks about removing hold - I didn't contact my advisor, she would've said to email the secretary,(many people in the nursing completion program had the same problems) -I think I must have tried to register for class about 12 times before I was able to get registered - Registration schedule kept telling me I 'could be dropped' a week after I set up a Nelnet payment plan (I had classes dropped when I tried to make payments without this \$25 plan, too many dates and percentages of payment to meet)
- [View](#) somewhat but very little just to ensure I was taking the classes that would be useful if I was to enroll in a BSN program
- [View](#) no
- [View](#) Yes, graduation requirements.
- [View](#) Hygiene
- [View](#) Yes. For advice on what classes to take and to prepare for graduation.
- [View](#) Yes, career counseling and course selection
- [View](#) Yes. When I was in my 2 year RN program, I sought advise from my advisor almost weekly. She was more accessible because classes were onsite.
- [View](#) Previous degree I mainly used instructors for help.
- [View](#) Yes, class requirements
- [View](#) yes
- [View](#) never

13. How important is academic advising to you?

Text Response

- [View](#) Very important
- [View](#) Very
- [View](#) Important.
- [View](#) very critical if you attend a large college or university, many students can get lost in the crowd and can become very discouraged if they cannot get help or find the resources and support they need
- [View](#) Very important as a non-traditional student.
- [View](#) Very
- [View](#) I'd like someone to be available if i have questions
- [View](#) Somewhat
- [View](#) Very important
- [View](#) It is important to have someone to consult with, help answer questions that come up, etc.
- [View](#) very important
- [View](#) If they are willing to help you and are respectful to the students they would be very important. The ones I have encountered just seem too busy and as if you are bothering them.
- [View](#) Very
- [View](#) Very important.
- [View](#) Very important. The program requirements changed while I was enrolled, and some of the classes I was planning to take were removed, so I have needed academic advising to keep me on track with the right substitutions for classes. It is wonderful to have someone that will evaluate my plan of study, confirm I am on the right track or help me decide what alternative classes I need to take.
- [View](#) Very. I'm paying a lot of money and putting a lot of time and effort into this education. For about a year and 1/2 during the RN BSN completion program, my listed academic advisor didn't work for MNSU anymore. I asked to have this fixed many times. Was told I had a student advisor, I thought this meant she was a fellow student who would help with advising. I've never had communication with her where she introduced herself or asked if I needed any assistance. I didnt contact her when I couldn't register.
- [View](#) Important but in all honesty I did not have time to try to get in contact or stay in contact due to the demands of the program, work, family, life. It was all I could do just to manage that.
- [View](#) initially it is very important, I will graduate in a few weeks and so I have not used her as much the last couple of semesters
- [View](#) VERY important. Kasi at MSU has been more than helpful and made the transition stage very smooth for me.
- [View](#) Good
- [View](#) Very important
- [View](#) important as students need someone to go to - my oly wish for academic advisors is to be more proactive to their students - all too often students are left out in the cold when someone should be contacting them especially when there are application deadlines

14. Do you feel that you have

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Just the right amount of information coming from your advisor	21	68%
2	More information than you need from your advisor	1	3%
3	Less information than you feel you need from your advisor	9	29%
	Total	31	100%

15. How satisfied with you are your academic advising experiences? Please describe the positives and nam...

Text Response

- [View](#) My assigned advisor in Mankato is very helpful but her proxy at the Normandale campus has been terrible. She would not return numerous emails, vm to schedule a face to face meeting and sign a form. I contacted her 1 month before registration and no response. 4 days after my registration window opened I received a brief email from her but it didn't explain anything...
- [View](#) My advising experience at MNSU has been terrible. I hate having to contact her because she always makes me feel like I am a bother to her. I will contact my past adviser at Mn West to help me before I will contact the nursing adviser for the RN to BSN program at MNSU.
- [View](#) Academic advising has been helpful in navigating the online university setting. The advisor is knowledgeable about what classes I need to take.
- [View](#) very satisfied! my advisor(s) has been available when I needed to meet with them, helped me get everything in order with registration and class schedules, and answered all of my questions
- [View](#) Since I am a non-traditional student and not on campus, it is really difficult to connect with an advisor.
- [View](#) Excellent follow up and very helpful. I have been very satisfied with our advisor for RN-BSN program.
- [View](#) nothing to say here
- [View](#) I have been very please with my experience with my advisor
- [View](#) Personally, I did not need much interaction with my advisor, but value the role.
- [View](#) very satisfied.
- [View](#) Work on Communication skills.
- [View](#) I have had good responses from my advisor, I have been enrolled since 2011. One time I enrolled and took a class that resulted in some type of violation, and my advisor worked with me to get that violation waived and the substitution granted.
- [View](#) Very dissatisfied.
- [View](#) I am satisfied, I know if I would have needed help I could have pursued it. I chose to use it minimally. It would have been nice to have an advisor discuss all program options in the very beginning when I first enrolled. Perhaps to encourage or inform of certain classes or a program that could have led me straight to a master degree or doctorate.
- [View](#) Fine, I live far away and only used her when I had questions about the program and on-line issues. Didn't really overly use her.
- [View](#) Very satisfied. My advisor is very knowledgeable and is quick to respond to emails.
- [View](#) Good
- [View](#) I took all my classes online and was not able to use the academic advising on campus.
- [View](#) they haven't contacted my I have to contact them - shouldn't it be the other way around?
- [View](#) The online learning experience is a completely different learning dynamic and therefore the amount of interaction I receive, or seek from my academic advisor is also completely different due to these dynamics. I check in once in awhile to make sure I'm on the right track, but I seek support from other areas.
- [View](#) Pretty satisfied. Wasn't as happy when I found out I needed to take more generals (through the audit report) then I thought (seems some transfer classes could've counted in other areas). But, nice to know exactly what I need to complete the program and to follow a plan. Advisor has always promptly responded and answered all questions. Seems knowledgeable of my program.

16. Ideally, you would receive

#	Answer	Response	%
1	One email or packet of information once a semester	18	52%
2	Lots of small emails throughout the semester as deadlines and issues came up	12	39%
3	Hard copy mailings	3	10%
	Total	31	100%

17. Ideally, what times of the day would you be able to contact your academic advisor:

#	Answer	Response	%
1	between 8 and noon	13	45%
2	Between noon and 5	10	34%
3	between 5 and 8	6	21%
	Total	29	100%

18. Rank the following in terms of your preference for communication between your advisor and you:

#	Answer	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses
1	by personal email	14	8	2	0	0	24
2	by MN State, Mankato email	9	11	1	2	1	24
3	by phone	1	3	18	2	0	24
4	by Skype	0	0	1	10	13	24
5	texts	0	2	2	10	10	24
	Total	24	24	24	24	24	-

19. If you could recommend one change to improve your university experience as a distance student, what...



More...

Text Response

[View](#) The advisor at Normandale needs assistance. Being a distance learner leaves me feeling disconnected and when someone who is supposed to be available ignores my repeated requests for help it left me feeling isolated and frustrated. I was ready to drive to Mankato just have someone help me...not good.

[View](#) As a distant learning student I have not had any major difficulties. I find the biggest challenge has been when I need tech support

[View](#) More engagement from advisors prior to starting the program. I was accepted into the nursing program for Spring, 2013, however, I did not receive the nursing school acceptance letter and the week before classes started I began receiving emails about not being registered for classes already. I had made 2 calls to the school of nursing to check on my application and did not receive a call back so I made the assumption that I did not get accepted. The program director allowed me to enroll for summer or fall because I could not rearrange my life on such short notice. I chose fall and expected to receive some emails giving me instructions on how to register and for what classes. One month prior to the start of term I reached out to the advisor and asked what I should be doing. Turns out I should have registered months earlier and it was a total scramble to get ready for the term. Had I not reached out the same thing would have happened as it did in the spring. I think distance students deserve to be reached out to prior to the beginning of the program by an academic advisor and guided through the initial stages of the program. Now that I'm enrolled and reacquainted with the academic environment I am much more independent, but after 10 years I was a bit rusty and felt like I was expected to know exactly what I should have been doing. I sensed frustration on the part of the school of nursing staff because I was flailing. Overall being a new student was a negative experience and start to the program. I have always been a good student and quick learner and this process was extremely frustrating. I did not feel like the school of nursing valued my experience.

[View](#) Stop charging me the same student fees that on-campus students are charged. Taking online classes already make me feel more like a revenue stream than a real student, I don't feel I should pay fees for building improvements, student activities, health services, campus rec, and intercollegiate athletics. I don't benefit from any of these fees, why should I be made to pay them?

[View](#) I've only had one class but I think I'm prepared to say there has been very little actual instruction.

[View](#) I have been very satisfied with my distance education

[View](#) My worst complaint about my distance experience involved the advisor quitting just before I started, not having an advisor for a period of time and the entire program undergoing reform.

[View](#) I would recommend better library service. As an online student, I always struggle to find articles, although I know how to do it. I will not find the resources I need. Recently, my teacher taught how to trick the Internet to make it think that I am in the campus by using VPN.MNSU.EDU. I was able to get more results when I did that.

[View](#) This is not related to the advisors, but in the couple years I have been enrolled, I do not feel as if I get much interaction from the teachers/professors with the online classes. I list this in my class evaluations at the end of the semester. I would LOVE it if the professors would participate in student discussions and add to our knowledge through the discussions. Usually it just feels like we (distance learning students) get the assignment, read the book, discuss it with our peers, get a grade... then maybe get some feedback after the discussion is done. I feel the professors, with their vast knowledge in the subject, could really contribute some great ideas, alternative viewpoints or direct conversations in a different manner. That type of interaction with the instructors is something I very much miss in comparison to brick and mortar classrooms.

[View](#) Have adequate advising in place, with clear information. I think I only have 1 more class to register for, but the way things have been going I really don't think they will say I have met the long list of degree requirements. (I looked at my DARS audit again this semester - it doesn't match with what the advisor is telling me) The curriculum has been changing since I started the program and that has gotten mixed up.

[View](#) Make it much more clear with the transcripts what is required, what you have accomplished, and what yet needs to be accomplished. The transcript they mail are like a foreign language if you ask me. Some of the classes could have had more clear directions for assignments.

[View](#) Once I got through the first semester and knew how to use the services and technology I was fine. I'm not a very techy person so the set up and first semester made me nervous but figured most things out pretty quickly. The tutorials are nice.

[View](#) No recommendations at this time.

[View](#) More detail

[View](#) This university needs to contact the student when things/ paperwork/files need to be completed this is really crappy at this university because if the student doesn't ask no one contacts you - to me this is TERRIBLE!!!!

[View](#) Let me use my personal email for all communications with advisors and instructors, and not enforce having to send emails from the Mankato State email system. This is an inconvenience to me. I like to have my school email forwarded to my personal email to ensure that I don't miss emails. I don't use the Mankato email ever! I don't even know my password. It doesn't make sense to me that I have my mail forwarded but then can not respond to it unless it's from my Mankato account. Very inconvenient!

[View](#) Having more general ed. classes offered on-line.

[View](#) virtual classroom at least to experience the human touch.

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20. Would you participate in



#	Question	No	Maybe	Definitely	Total Responses	Mean
1	Once-a-Semester meeting for questions/answers about extended learning held near you?	12	15	4	31	1.74
2	Facebook page for questions/answers	10	14	6	30	1.87
3	College of Extended Learning Blogsite	11	14	4	29	1.78
4	Extended Learning Virtual Club	16	10	3	29	1.55

Text Response	
View	I am working with my advisor in Mankato. She has been very helpful.
View	None
View	I may contact Deb Beal in the registrars office, she has been helpful before. Maybe, last time I tried to clarify things I wound up in a different curriculum. This curriculum would've required 7 more credits, I'm going to just hope, and wait and see if it's true that I only need to register for 1 more class in Fall of 2014.
View	Each and every class should have an evaluation. The class that was my worst experience was a class that there was no evaluation of the instructor and how she did teaching the class. She was certainly most critical of everyone else so constructive feedback is necessary for Professor to improve teaching and enhancing the Learning experience for the student.
View	Sure
View	I think I'm on track. Glad you offer resources.

Discussion

Ideally, students and advisors would have common understandings, values, and activities and would understand that both have an active role in the student's ultimate success. Where do they learn that? Looking at the advising pages for programs, it seems to me that the student might get confused trying to figure out whom, exactly they are supposed to contact and when, exactly those people might be available. Students must learn and advisors must reinforce the learning about program requirements and student services and that learning must start at the website, which right now, is kind of dizzying and sites link to others. As the

research indicates, conveying caring is important, too. While a lot of the respondents here were happy with their advising experiences, a number were disgruntled. One of the biggest complaints advisors have is their perception that students want everything NOW. Both should understand what reasonable expectations should look like and it's not clear that the students ever learn what they need about advising resources or the role of the advisor. All communication should include some briefly stated explanations of reasonable expectations of both advisees and advisors. Students should not have to wait too long for a response but advisors clearly cannot jump to every communication either.

Communication & Technology

Communication, it seems to me, should be intentionally duplicative. I think it would be good to start with these (taken from the Advising Task Force Report) on the advising page, the department page, the program page:

Minnesota State University, Mankato Advising Goals

Academic advising at MSU-Mankato is **an intentional educational partnership** to support and enhance learning. This multi-dimensional and developmental process supports students' diverse backgrounds, interests, and abilities and facilitates students' achievement of educational, career, and life goals.

Minnesota State University-Mankato Advising Values

Academic advising at MSU-Mankato reflects the University's commitment to promote learning by:

- Valuing and supporting students' intellectual and educational needs and development
- Valuing a collaborative environment across various constituencies (e.g., students, faculty, & staff, resources on campus and in the community)
- Supporting intentional partnerships and trust among the university's students, faculty & staff
- Valuing the diversity of students, faculty & staff

- Empowering students to be responsible and gain self-reliance for their decisions/choices

Advisor Goals/Responsibilities

KNOW

1. Academic advisors are knowledgeable of institutional policies, procedures and requirements.
2. Academic advisors are aware of campus resources available to assist students.
3. Academic advisors are knowledgeable of curricular requirements for general education, majors, minors, & graduation.

DO

4. Advising sessions facilitate student self-responsibility.
5. Academic advising meetings involve the student's development of both long-term and short-term goals and plans.
6. Advising sessions are accessible, frequent, and of sufficient length.

VALUE

7. Academic advisors respect the individuality and time of students.
8. Academic advisors support, promote & value intentional partnerships and trust among the university's students, faculty & staff.

Student Goals/Responsibilities

KNOW

1. Students are knowledgeable of institutional policies, procedures and requirements and the consequences for failing to meet them.
2. Students are aware of the various resources and services on-campus.
3. Students are knowledgeable of curricular requirements for general education, major, minor & graduation.

DO

4. Students are able to recognize and accept personal responsibility for their educational, career, and life goals.
5. Students implement strategies to be successful in educational, career, and life goals.
6. Students utilize the resources & relationships available to them in the University community to advance their educational and career goals.

VALUE

7. Students develop positive, professional relationship(s) with MSU faculty/staff.
8. Students connect with the MSU campus community.
9. Students value the time and individuality of faculty, staff & peers.

IF THIS IS NOT the case, then make it clear to the students that they should NOT expect timely caring advising so they know that this is the case. I think communication should happen during nontraditional hours, since it is clear that these students have multiple responsibilities and only offering advising from 9-5 does not seem user-friendly, since 6 of the 29 respondents wanted advising between 5 and 8. While most of the advisors in our discussion deal with advisee communication at home after hours, I don't think that's a great idea. We can tell what we value by what we pay for. Do we value advising or not? Someone should be TASKED

with advising after hours, maybe piloting a few 5-8 slots for a semester, making sure that the students know it's an option and carefully study the number and kinds of questions asked. This could be accomplished with a voluntary shifting of hours, perhaps, or hiring a GA who has worked in advising in an office on campus.

Advising does not need to be scheduled for an in person meeting, it can be scheduled for a phone/virtual meeting but it seems to me that offering an online program without advising available outside of the 9-5 hours is not meeting the intention of an online program, which we at MSU claim in our website to offer up "flexible schedule includes evening and weekend classes that are available online or at our convenient Edina and Twin Cities partner locations."

A number of advisors went to a conference on distance advising and listed below are some of the technologies noted. Ideally, a group of advisors/technology people/administrators would get together and decide on a few technologies that would be equally accessible on Macs, PC's, tablets, iPhone and whatever the new technologies that may emerge including our D2L or RightNow by Oracle or Hobson Retain. A complaint was lodged about ISRS being unable to operate on a Mac, so that advisor MUST come into campus to use her PC. Also, everyone laughs when people say that ISRS is user unfriendly, but it seriously is? What is being done about that? Also the fact that I couldn't get a run of extended campus students because there is no coding to indicate online students seems problematic. Whatever the technology used, people must be trained on it, it must be something that everyone can ask each other about when they run into difficulties and there should be shared documents/videos for the basics (to specific audiences? Faculty Advisors/Students/Fulltime Advisors/Departmental Administration Assistants) such as how to read an interactive degree audit for both student and advisor audiences. In addition, the university community really needs to have common language. If the students see something as Interactive Degree Audit and faculty refer to it as DARS, there's a problem. Perhaps a smallish group could be formed including technology and advising folks to agree upon language and explore committing to certain technology for use with advising. These are some of the technology discussed at the conference or in conversations.

- Appointment Plus
- Google Voice
- <http://www.hobsons.com/>
- Instapper
- Docs.google.com
- Pbworks.com
- Wikispaces.com
- Camtasia Relay
- Lecture Capture
- ISpring
- YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, E-Clips , Jing (screencapture)
- TimeTrade

Orientation

The orientation of students should stress their role in their academic future along with reasonable expectations for themselves and their advisors. They need something in the bulletin that they are held responsible for (academic policies pages). One idea is to have a D2L page that they can take and be quizzed on, with modules on how to read a degree audit, how to register, including the advanced search capabilities, etc. A more robust planning guide should be created. Students should know where to go to get an idea of which classes are offered 3 semesters forward, or at least as far out as the department can tentatively establish. Another idea might be to perhaps have weekly modules that the student is encouraged to accomplish each week? Sometimes I sense a certain amount of frustration from advisors that their students seem unprepared for advising appointments. Students aren't TAUGHT to be college students anywhere, however. It is a complicated process, involving learning about themselves as time managers, learning about programs, general education and graduation requirements, and learning the nuts and bolts of multiple technologies—D2L, the Registration System, Financial Aid Application systems, etc. I understand advisor frustration but I also do not know of an officially sanctioned mechanism to teach them about what they need to understand about the Bulletin, about the registration system, and about graduating. I would recommend that a real or virtual educational process be created to help the students understand everything they need to know to graduate in a timely fashion.

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