Breaking Through the Student Communications Barrier

Email and In-Person Strategies to Promote Better Student Decision Making
Navigating GoToWebinar

**Basic Logistics**

*Click the orange button to hide or show the control panel.*

*Click the blue button to make the presentation full screen.*

**To Participate**

*Enter other questions or comments in the question box and click “Send.”*
Today’s Presenters

Lindsay Miars
Director
lmiars@eab.com
202-266-6877

Ben Galina
Consultant
bgalina@eab.com
202-568-7316
1. Email Communication

2. In-Person Communication
What's a Break Type?

Break types can be anything that you want to consider the section following the divider as:

- Section
- Chapter
- Essay
- Appendix
- Etc.

If not needed, you may delete the break type box.

Email Communication

Cutting Through “Inbox Noise” to Prompt Student Action
When Did We Become Spam?

Universities Rely Heavily on Email, but Students Think It’s Noise

Students Hold a Less-Than-Esteemed View of University Messages

72% Treat emails from student organizations as spam

54% Don’t always read emails from their university or academic department

35% Don’t always read emails from their advisor

“When I ask students if they read my email, they say, ‘I never got an email from you’—but that can’t be true, I sent seven!”

Director of Advising
Public Regional University

Source: Bowling Green State University Survey, Presented at the 2016 Information and Telecommunications Education and Research Association Conference; EAB interviews and analysis.
The Downward Spiral of an Unread Email

Missed Communications Can Result in Dire Consequences

One Student’s Story

Student ready to withdraw because they couldn’t afford tuition bill

In the National News

“Though Emory sent weekly e-mails—17 of them, along with an invitation to a program for minority students—they went to a school account Angelica had not learned to check. From the start, the wires were crossed.”

Jason DeParle
The New York Times

Student never saw the email because, in his words: “Students here never read their university email”
Summary of This Year’s Research

Breaking Through the Student Communications Barrier

The Communications Funnel

University-Level Coordination to Reduce Inbox Noise

Writing More Effective Emails and Scaling Best Practices to Your Staff

Applying ‘Nudging’ Principles to Message Architecture

Student opens email

Students reads email

Student takes desired action
Information Regarding Your Academic Progress

Dear Laura:

University policy requires that all students declare a major prior to completing 60 units. Records indicate that you are currently undeclared and have completed at least 45 credits. Records also indicate that your GPA is below a 2.5, which is the minimum required threshold for many majors at the University.

There are many resources here at the University that can help you in selecting your major and improving your GPA. There is still time to adjust your skills and work to make some necessary improvements. A success coach can help you set goals and develop skills necessary to achieve success. With the help of the success coach, you can work on a variety of topics such as study skills, organizational techniques, and time management, among many other items. Additionally the career center on campus is staffed with career counselors who can administer an interest inventory and help you explore the connection between careers and majors. I hope you will reach out to one of these offices to support your progress.

Sincerely,

John Smith
Office of Student Success
(202) 555.5555
Information Regarding Your Academic Progress

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Make Your Subject Line Do More Work

A Good First Impression Drives Higher Open Rates

**Insights from Out-of-Industry**
*Mixpanel Analysis of 85,637 Subject Lines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in Open Rate</th>
<th>Benchmark open rate for 1.7 billion emails</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>+1.5%</strong> Subject line less than 30 characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>-0.6%</strong> Subject line more than 30 characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>+1.7%</strong> Subject line includes a “?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>+7.5%</strong> Subject line includes “How to…”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Nine Effective Approaches**
*Adapted from Advisory Board’s Internal Guidelines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catchy</th>
<th>Oops—you missed your registration deadline!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<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 your 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>

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.”

Language Should Be Clear to All Students (Including ESL)

➤ Reduce multisyllabic words
“Exempted” ➞ “Do not need to”

➤ Remove passive voice
“If you are contacted by your advisor” ➞ “If your advisor contacts you”

➤ Translate jargon
“Non-credit-bearing” ➞ “Does not count for credit”

➤ Ensure readability
The Gunning Fog Index is an online tool to assess the grade-level of a given text

Tool: “Higher Ed Jargon Reduction Exercise” on eab.com

50% Increase in response rate (Royall recruitment campaign)

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Don’t Ignore Your CTA

The Call to Action Is Critical, but Often the Hardest Part to Get Right

Out-of-Industry Best Practices

Include Only One CTA When Possible

42% increase in clicks when the number of CTAs are reduced from 4 to 1

Lead with a CTA in the Subject Line

Include the CTA in the subject line so students immediately know what they need to do

Make Your CTA Stand Out

Register Now

Offset CTAs with bold, different colored text, or buttons

Convey a Sense of Urgency

Use action verbs that convey a sense of urgency, such as “sign up,” “schedule,” or “pay”

New Resource
To Improve Student Emails

What’s inside?
- Summary of email best practices
- Communications audit worksheet
- Email templates for inspiration

Worksheet: Student Communications Audit

Email Templates and Best Practices
Resources from Breaking Through the Student Communications Barrier

Download from the Handouts section of your control panel
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Dear Laura:

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Sincerely,

John Smith
Office of Student Success
(202) 555.5555
You’re missing the mark

Laura,

I’m reaching out because I see that you are currently undeclared and have completed 52 credits. You must declare by 60 credits. I also see that your GPA is 2.34, which is below the required minimum (2.50) for many majors.

There is still time for you to improve and we have many resources to help you select a major and improve your GPA:

• A success coach can help you set goals, develop study skills, and more.
• Counselors in the career center can help you explore your interested and discuss the connection between careers and majors.

Please reach out to one or both of the offices above to schedule an appointment before the end of the term.

If you have any questions, you can email or call me at the number below. I will be following up to check on your progress!

- John Smith
  Office of Student Success
  (202) 555.5555
In-Person Communication
Effectively Navigating Difficult Conversations
What’s Behind Declining Grades?

Grades Often Just an Indication of Deeper Issues in a Student’s Life

Root Causes Differ for Each Student, But With Similar Outcomes

- Unrealistic Expectations
- Lingering academic underpreparedness
- Loss of academic direction and goals
- Added family commitments
- Additional time spent working
- Prolonged injury or illness
- Declining mental health
- New social distractions

Academic probation
Loss of financial aid eligibility
Denied admission to selective major
Disillusionment with college

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Once in Your Office, They Don’t Always Listen

“Cognitive Perseveration” at the Root of Many Challenging Conversations

**Cognitive Perseveration**

Repeating an action even after learning that it produces a poor outcome; a form of “never quitting” that is unhealthy and unproductive

Predicts eventual academic failure, especially in males

**Examples**

- A freshman feels pressure from parents to become an engineer, but has failed three math courses
- A sophomore who was rejected twice from the music performance program wants to audition again
- A junior is determined to apply to medical school, but currently has a 1.7 GPA

**Contributing Factors**

- Parent pressure
- Lack of cognitive flexibility
- Not aware of alternatives
- General under-preparedness

Many Theoretical Approaches to Difficult Conversations

Transformational Leadership Theory
Inspire and motivate students to work toward a new goal or “backup” plan

Theory of Social Validation
Confirm and support first generation students in their decision-making process

Solution-Focused Counseling
Use strategic questioning to lead students to the best path forward

The Five Stages of Grief
Prepare for and help students cope with an emotional response to involuntary change

Chaos Theory
Approach career planning conversations with the understanding that long-term outcomes can’t always be predicted

Growth Mindset
Teach millennial students to be resourceful and grow from failures or setbacks

Non-Verbal Communication
Be conscious of the manner in which you are communicating, including tone and body language

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Often a Matter of Preference

Advising Philosophy Informs In-Person Approach

Which Theory MOST Aligns With Your Own Advising Philosophy?
SSC Survey of 1,213 Users, February 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental advising</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative advising</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising as teaching</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive/intrusive advising</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescriptive advising</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-Person Approach

- **Supportive**
  - Positive, student-centered guidance
  - Coaching bolstered by **data**
  - Helping a student “put the pieces together” through inquiry and discussion

- **Direct**
  - Deliberate intervention initiated by advisor
  - Tone is firm but supportive
  - Transparent about obstacles and what the **data** indicates
  - Prescriptive about next steps

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
“Root Cause” Approach

Appreciative Advising Forms Basis for Effective Conversations

Approach Devised by:

Steven Antalvari
Director, University Advising

Guiding Principles

Do!

- Actively listen
- Be genuine
- Reframe
- Imagine
  - Pair strength with area for improvement
- Innovate
  - Develop a proactive vision statement (goal)
- Connect

Don’t!

- Jump to conclusions
- Band Aid
- Provide a direct solution
- Dictate
- Tell the student to “figure it out”
Diagnose What’s Going on Behind the Scenes

Where Do We Start? Where Do You Go From Here?

Start with the Positive (Appreciative Advising)

- Start with the positive (Appreciative Advising)
  - Spend a few minutes relationship building
    - Make notations in advising system about their family, job, pets, kids, interests, etc.
    - Students are more likely to “open up” with someone they trust

Transition to Academic Discussion

- Lead with their strengths (Inquire – AA)
  - “Your progress in your minor has been very strong”
  - “You have done really well in your Psychology courses”
- Tie a strength/s to academic success
  - Inquire about progress in general
    - “You have excelled in several courses, but I notice there are a few courses/subject areas in which you have struggled”
    - “What is it about the class that prevented you from getting the grade you really wanted?”
  - Assist the student in “putting together the pieces”
Empower the Student to Move Forward

Introducing the Parallel Plan

**Introducing the Parallel Plan (Never Call it “Plan B”)**

- Introduce the idea over a couple of advising sessions
  - If a competitive major, set the expectation in the first appointment (orientation initial appt.)
  - Reaffirm the expectation in second appointment, but connect student with resources and assistance
  - Third appointment – parallel plans are not new ideas, but it can now be reintroduced

**Parallel Plan Discussion**

- First ask why
  - What made you decide major “X”? 
- Reframe their interest
  - So you chose Nursing because you want to help people. What is it about helping people that interests you?
  - Have you ever thought about helping people as it relates to your strengths in “X”?
A Framework for Leveraging Data

How Advisors Have Used SSC to Overcome Cognitive Perseveration

**Preempt**
*Identify students before a difficult conversation becomes necessary*

- Establish and communicate clear, data-driven guidelines for admission into selective programs
- Identify and reach out to students not predicted to succeed in their current or desired major

**Persuade**
*Build urgency, convince the student to change or act*

- Explain to a student their predicted risk level/risk score compared to successful peers
- Use missed/upcoming success markers to show a student the hill they will have to climb

**Reframe**
*Get the student excited about a tailored “back-up” plan*

- Use risk predictions in the Major Explorer to build a student’s confidence about success in an alternative major
- Start a conversation using SSC career data
What If You Prefer a More Direct Approach?

“SSC Cheat Sheet” for Referencing SSC Data in Student Conversations

Sample Scripting

“I’m noticing that you’re not performing well in some critical courses. What’s going on with these SOCI courses? These are supposed to be pretty easy for you.

At this university, students who get below a B- in SOCI1101 and SOCI1160 are predicted to be less likely to graduate in the Sociology major. You want to be above that threshold, and it looks like you earned a D in SOCI1101, but haven’t cleared SOCI1160.

You will need to focus on your SOCI courses going forward if you want to stay in Sociology. What goal are we working towards when you graduate?”
Questions?

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Director  
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Ben Galina  
Consultant  
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Please Fill Out the Exit Survey!

- As you exit the webinar, you will be directed to an evaluation that will automatically load in your web browser.
- Please take a minute to provide your thoughts on the presentation.

THANK YOU!

Please note that the survey does not apply to webconferences viewed on demand.