Supporting Student Conversations with SSC

Strategies and Scripting to Promote Desired Actions

April 19, 2016
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1. What Makes Student Conversations Challenging?

2. Guiding Students to Action with Better Outreach

3. Navigating In-Person 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.
Problem #1

Students Don’t Always Read Emails

University Communications Getting Lost in Students’ Inboxes

**Millennials Can Check Email Anywhere...**

- **85%**
  - Of 18-24 year olds own a smartphone

**...But Read and Respond Selectively**

*Results of BGSU Communications Survey (315 students)*

- **54%**
  - Of respondents said they don’t always read emails from the university or academic departments

- **39%**
  - Of respondents said they don’t always open emails from their advisors

**University Email Tends to Be:**

- **Passive**
  - Emails do not require action, or merely direct students to self-service portals

- **Generic**
  - Impersonal e-mails are easy to ignore and contribute to “white noise”

- **Wrong voice and tone**
  - Language in messages is often unfriendly and administrative

- **Not mobile-responsive**
  - Emails not designed to be read on a smartphone appear clunky, confusing

Problem #2

Difficult to Prompt Student Action

Significant Gap Between Opening an Email and Following Its Instructions

The Communications “Funnel”

Student Opens Email

Can track with open rate in many email programs including SSC–Campus

Student Reads Email in Full

Difficult to track

Student Takes Action

Observed drop-off can be more than half

Can track some actions (scheduled appointment, registered for courses, etc.) in SSC–Campus

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Problem #3

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

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
1. What Makes Student Conversations Challenging?

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How Can We Break Through to Students?

Early Insight Into Their Communication Preferences

How EAB Has Collected Insight:

100+ Research interviews and concept tests with students

300+ A/B split tests to determine optimal communication strategies

9,000+ First-year students surveyed on technology and mobile habits

Students Want Outreach That Is:

1. **Customized**
   - Including a student’s individual grades or goals in a message increases response rates by 50%

2. **Humanized**
   - Just including a sender’s name and face increases response rates by 26%

3. **Dedicated**
   - Millennials want a different look and feel for different types of communications (think apps)

Create easy access to information

Build context for important dates and tasks

Prompt them to complete important tasks

Provide validation when they’re back on the right track

Remind them quickly if they miss something important

Source: Royall & Company research and analysis; EAB interviews and analysis.
Applying Insight to Email

Strategies to Get More Students Through the Communications Funnel

The Communications “Funnel”

Student Opens Email

- Consider Your Subject Line
- Be Persistent

Student Reads Email in Full

- Use Direct and Student-Centered Language
- Consider Including Other Voices

Student Takes Action

- Include a Clear Call to Action
- When Possible, Add Direct Links to Schedule Appointments, etc.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.
Cutting Through Inbox Noise
Two Strategies for Higher Open Rates

Consider Your Subject Line
Nine Options for Effective SLs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Subject Line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snappy</td>
<td>Oops—you missed your registration deadline!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Concerned About Your Midterm Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urgent</td>
<td>URGENT: Your Academic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Next steps to get you back on track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational</td>
<td>Let’s chat about Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysterious</td>
<td>You qualify for a new program!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guiding</td>
<td>How the Tutoring Center can help your GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented</td>
<td>Schedule some time with me this week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogatory</td>
<td>Is there a reason you have not yet registered for next semester?</td>
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Be Persistent
Students May Not Take Action Until 5+ Emails

Response by Email Contact
(Entering Class 2015)

35% of all deposits come from students responding after the 5th message

Source: Royall & Company research and analysis; EAB interviews and analysis.
Convey Your Message Quickly and Compellingly

Language and Tone Should Be Urgent and Student-Centered

Urgent Tone Improves Student Response Rate

Response Rate by Outreach Approach
Targeted Campaign Initiative at CMU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach Approach</th>
<th>Email, Soft</th>
<th>Email, Urgent</th>
<th>Phone Call</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success Rate</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
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Focus on the Student and Their Goals, Not on 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.”

Source: Royall & Company research and analysis; EAB interviews and analysis.
The University of Michigan’s Customized Peer Success Pushes

Students Just Like You
Advice from your peers after the first exam

We interviewed past Physics 120 students who performed well in the course to see what advice they’d give to someone like you after the first exam. Here’s what one had to say:

"Don’t lose hope! Go over what you got wrong and talk to someone in the UM Science Learning Center about how you should have approached those problems.

Another strategy I found helpful was to complete additional practice exams, focusing on the concepts I had trouble with on the exam. The good news is that, as you learn the new material, you now have a sense of how it might be turned into an exam question!

It is still early in the course and you can still do well!"

Blythe Danner
Pre-Med, 2014

Blythe is currently a Sophomore student and took physics for life science majors because, like you, she is preparing for the MCAT.
Include a Clear Call to Action ("CTA")

SSC-Campus Allows for Direct Appointment Scheduling

What the Student Sees

Please schedule your advising appointment.

Hello Aislin Bastedo:
You have been requested, by your advisor, to schedule an appointment with them. By clicking the link provided, you can simply select a time that works with your schedule, save it, and an appointment will be created for you.

Note from Advisor:
I am concerned that your GPA has fallen below 2.5. I find that students really struggle when their GPA drops below that point. Please schedule an appt with me using the link below and we can discuss your options.

Schedule Advising Appointment

You can also copy and paste this address into your web browser:
https://whitehurst.campus-training.eab.com/a/7YcsM5N8lf

Other CTAs: Schedule Tutoring Appointment, Register for Courses, Pay Outstanding Balance [Include Links!]
Sample Outreach Script #1

**Sent to:** Pre-Nursing Sophomores with GPAs between 3.0 and 3.5

**Objective:** Support Pre-Nursing Students Just Below Threshold of Entry to the Nursing Program (Including Creation of Parallel Plans)

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Subject: You qualify for our new program!

Dear <FirstName>,

Welcome back! We hope that you had an amazing summer and that you all rested up and ready to start the fall 2014 semester.

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

*Use this link to schedule a program appointment* or respond to attend one of the office hours listed below.
Sample Outreach Script #2

Recipients: Students Struggling in the Chemistry Major (GPA > 2.5) Who Did Not Respond to First Round of Outreach

Objective: Persuade Student to Schedule Appointment with Advisor ASAP to Discuss Options

URGENT – Chemistry Plans

Hi <<FirstName>>,

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

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

Have a great day!
Putting It All Together

Sample Outreach Script #3

Recipients: Students Who Have Not Registered (Third Follow-Up)

Objective: Motivate Students to Register Immediately

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Is there a reason you have not yet registered for next semester classes?

Name,

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

If you are not able to complete your scheduling by 11:00 am tomorrow, you will have to wait until Schedule Clean-Up (April 27–May 8) and you are less likely to

If you need assistance, please let me know.
Recipient: Individual Student Who Changed Their Major After a Difficult Conversation with the Advisor

Objective: Affirm the Student’s Decision and Help Them Maintain Momentum

Subject line: Excited for your new journey!

Hi FirstName,

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

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

Are you familiar with the career services office? I would recommend you visit to learn more about opportunities in the field of sustainability. If you are interested, let me know before the end of May and I can put you in touch with one of my colleagues who is a career counselor there.
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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>
</thead>
<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.
Guest Speaker

“Root Cause” Approach at Kent State University

Appreciative Advising Forms Basis for Effective Conversations

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”
During the Appointment

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”?
After the Appointment

Next Steps

Directing Students to the Appropriate Resources

Resources Available to Students on SharePoint Site at Kent State

Other Resources & Follow Up Tips

Provide warm hand-off to other departments/support centers so students follow through

Send affirmation emails after student has taken action ("congrats," "keep it up")

Students “don’t do optional”—consider mandatory, structured follow-up tasks
What If You Prefer a More Direct Approach?

“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?”
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.*