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#### LEARNING LOG

What we say matters: exploring strategies for effective communications

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#### DETAILS

MAKING IT WORK, UNDERSTANDING WHAT WORKS, AND SHARING WHAT WORKS

##### TITLE

What we say matters: exploring strategies for effective communications


##### SOLUTION

Redesigned Planning Advising and Student Services

##### CAPACITIES

Policy;Information Technology;Institutional Research

##### Owner

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##### Record Type

Monthly-Current 2017



##### INSTITUTION

Arizona State University

#### REFLECTION

##### SITE INITIATIVE

Last week, I traveled to Oregon State University along with core members of the Provost office at ASU to join our colleagues at the University Innovation Alliance convening. The biannual convening brings together key representatives from the eleven institutions to share lessons learned/insights, brainstorm ideas, and discuss progress towards our mission to increase degree attainment among low-income, first-generation college students and underrepresented minorities. There were two related topics that kept resurfacing through roundtable discussions and keynote speeches:

1. What kind of impact-both negative and positive-does our existing communications have on our students?
2. Students do not read email and they don't pick up their phones anymore. How can we effectively connect with students in this new digital age-at scale?

These are core issues that as an institution, we are working to improve on our campus-particularly as it relates to academic advising. We are still learning so this log will serve more as a "here's what the research says and here are some of our strategies and unanswered questions."

##### PROGRESS TOWARD STUDENT SUCCESS

**First: What kind of impact-both negative and positive-does our existing communications have on our students?**

At the UIA convening, we discussed this question in relation to how we choose to communicate with students who are on academic probation. Almost all institutions have some kind of academic probation policy and a method for initially notifying students of their status. There is a lot of research out there telling us that we must be cautious of how we approach students with 'negative' news. In short-if we are not careful, the way we craft the message and the words we choose can illicit feelings of shame, a loss sense of belonging, guilt, anxiety, inadequacy, and embarrassment. These emotions, stirred by one letter, can create a perfect cocktail for self-dismissal from the University.

#### Quick Reads:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26468236> (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26468236>)

<http://rcgd.isr.umich.edu/seminars/Winter2017/WaltonWilsonUnderReview.pdf>

**Strategies:**

**Integrate positive psychology into communications:** Yes-it's been around for years now. We should all carry wrist bands that say "WWDD," short for "What would Carol Dweck do." We must make sure our communications to students have a foundation of empathy, encouragement and growth mindset. We are in the midst of reviewing our communications to integrate these kinds of messages with students with members of the Provost office and our core communications team. This not only includes reviewing our University academic communications but our advising cases in Peoplesoft.

**Positive psychology + personal outreach from faculty:** Faculty can be very effective "messengers" in this space. Students respond well and are motivated when their professors make time to say "I believe you can do better, you are not the only one, this is not doom and gloom, and let me help you reach your goals." Again, our team is brainstorming how we can more intentionally involve our faculty in these student success conversations.

**Second: Students do not read email and they don't pick up their phones anymore. How can we effectively connect with students in this new digital age-at scale?**

**Fun fact:** The first email was sent by Ray Tomlinson on Wednesday, June 8<sup>th</sup> 1971. Yes, folks, some 46 years ago. We are well behind the times in our search to find alternatives to email. In fact, I just read an email statistics report that says on average, most email users still receive 122 emails per day (<http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Email-Statistics-Report-2015-2019-Executive-Summary.pdf> (<http://www.radicati.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Email-Statistics-Report-2015-2019-Executive-Summary.pdf>)). With that being said, it's safe to say that email may continue to play a pivotal role in our communications with students. The question is how can we draft emails that actually get read by our students and how can we pair those emails with other forms of communications?

**Strategies**

**Effective email communications:** Institutions spend incredible amounts of money on marketing as well as on the analysis of that marketing for recruitment purposes. What subject lines work? How long should paragraphs be? What would illicit a response? It's time that we use the same techniques/tools to improve our academic and student success communications. We are working to integrate some of that analysis into our student success communications so we know what's working and what's not.

**Text messaging:** Millennials are texting more and talking less (<http://blog.admithub.com/16-statistics-why-schools-should-texting-and-messaging-students> (<http://blog.admithub.com/16-statistics-why-schools-should-texting-and-messaging-students>)). There are Universities that are having a lot of success with the use of text-messaging. This includes Georgia State University, both a member of the UIA and a member of the Frontier Set. They have a learning log that talks about their work with AdmitHub. We are also in the research stages of seeing how these kinds of systems could benefit our University as well.

**Apps like GetSet:** We know that students are responsive to peer-peer mentorship and engagement. GetSet, and others like it, is a suite of tools as well as a social network platform that provides a space where students can support each other by sharing their own stories. We are experimenting with this tool and learning how we can modify the tool to work for our institution.

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IMPACT❶

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INTERNAL/EXTERNAL RESOURCES❶

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NEXT CRITICAL STEPS❶

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OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES❶

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QUESTIONS/REQUESTS❶

What are you using as alternatives to email? How are you integrating positive psychology into your communications? What tools are you using to track the success of your email communications? What other strategies can you share to address the issues outlined above? I welcome all questions, comments and thoughts.

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STATUS

Final

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Completion Date❶

5/30/2017

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Brittney Paulk (/education/s/profile/00536000003BigzAAC) (Arizona State University) updated this record.

May 30, 2017 at 12:24 PM (/education/s/feed/0D53600001Nho2WCAR)

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