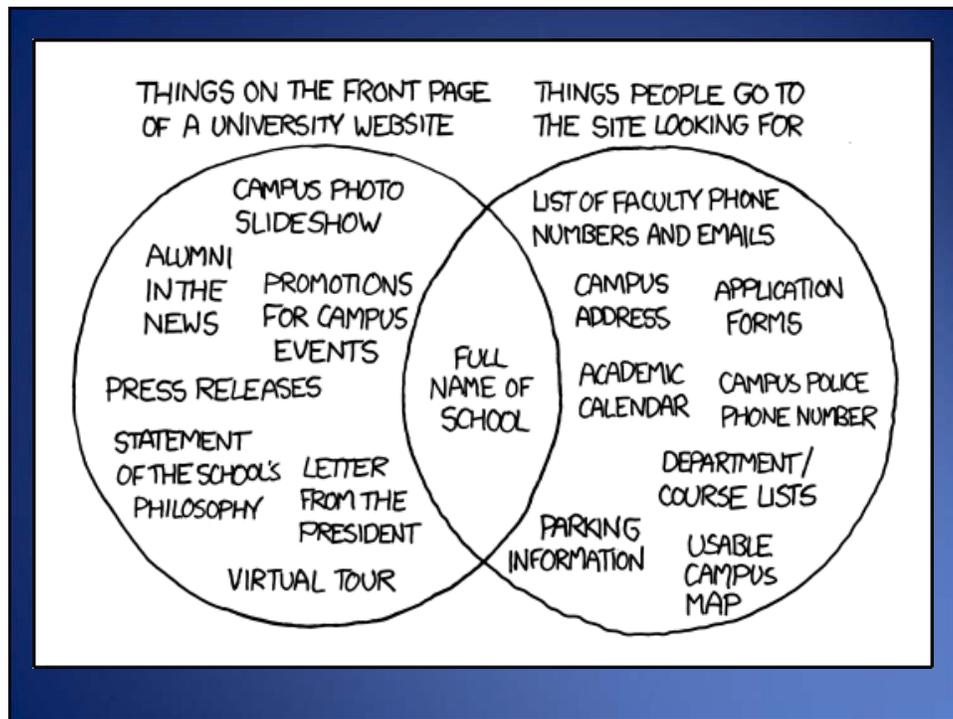


Academic Advising at a Distance F2F and Miles Away

Karen Thurmond
The University of Memphis

Communication Principles/Assumptions

- Advisor takes primary responsibility for good communication with student
- Advisor teaches good communication by demonstration



Meebo...what is it?

Meebo integrates various instant messaging (IM) applications to make it easier to access users of many IM applications

Meebo Widget

- First saw it in another university's academic advising website
- Implemented for quick questions
- Can be turned off and on if you have easy access to your website publishing tool
- Can be anonymous, text based, IM
- May integrate other IM applications (this is handy if you are already using another IM in advising)

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the UTM Student Success Center website. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <https://www.utm.edu/departments/success/askanadvisor.php>. The website features a navigation menu on the left with various services like 'Academic Major & Career Fair', 'Academic Probation', and 'Ask an Advisor'. The main content area is titled 'Student Success Center' and includes a 'Departmental heads' link. The 'Ask an Advisor' section is highlighted, showing a Meebo widget. The widget indicates that the 'SSC Advisor is offline' and provides contact information: 'Hours: 8:00 P. M. - 5:00 P. M. Monday - Friday', 'By Phone: 731.881.1689 and 731.881.7744', and 'By E-Mail: success@utm.edu'. It also lists the physical location: 'In person: Clement Hall, Room 210 (#37, Campus Map) 210 Hart Street (Driving Directions - Past Stop Sign, 2nd Building on Left)'. A 'get meebo' button is visible at the bottom of the widget. The browser's status bar at the bottom shows 'Internet' and '100%' zoom.

Thinking about Meebo Widget

1. Can I have quick and easy access to the website that students associate with my advising work?
2. Am I comfortable with instant messaging as a tool to assist me with any part of my advising practice?
3. In what way could this technology enhance my advising practice?

Skype



You can spend money, but...

Free options on Skype

- Voice and video calls to anyone else on Skype
- Conference calls with three or more people
- Instant messaging, file transfer and screen sharing

Thinking about Skype

1. Am I comfortable with video calling as a tool to assist me with any part of my advising practice?
2. In what way could this technology enhance my advising practice?

Academic Advising at a Distance: F2F and Miles Away

Meebo for “Quick Questions”

The meebo notifier allows you to preview a message in your windows taskbar without an open browser. Once installed, the notifier alerts you when there is a question waiting.

Examples of working meebo widgets for academic advising “quick questions”

<http://www.utm.edu/departments/success/askanadvisor.php>

<http://www.memphis.edu/advising/>

Instructions

1. Create an account on meebo.

<http://www.meebo.com/>

create this account with your school email if you plan to use the widget for student contact

if you want to try it out first, use/create an email on another server (gmail, yahoo, hotmail)

The widget will integrate messages from other IM programs. If you are already using another IM for student contact, you may sign on to these IM accounts inside of meebo and integrate them.

Options include:

AIM

Yahoo!

Facebook

Windows Live

MySpace

Googletalk

ICQ

Jabber

Flixster

My Yearbook

And more...

****NOTE**** If you discover that some of many of your students use an IM that you don't, you may want to create an account on that IM just so you can integrate it into meebo.

2. Find the download at: <http://www.meebo.com/notifier/>

Follow the instructions provided to install on your local machine.

3. Incorporate the widget into your website.

If you maintain your own website, this is easy. Copy and paste the code, decide on a invitation (mine says “Contact an Academic Advisor Now!”) and publish.

If you have a webmaster you will have to go through the process to add the widget to your website. Be aware that your campus may not allow this. If you get this feedback, ask for an alternative method of accomplishing the same goals with campus resources. Your goals for doing this are to:

a. go beyond email (a tool identified by Educause Center for Applied Research (ECAR) as ineffective for communication with traditional aged students)

b. create an instant access tool

c. develop advisor capacity for virtual advising

d. help students accomplish digital literacy learning objectives

4. Practice...when you first publish the widget do so in a less than obvious way...instead of an invitation post it as an * or a %. Ask a few students or colleagues to test it with you. Practice responding to their made up questions.

5. Go live! When you have time and are ready, post an invitation. Be prepared to make referrals-have all your notebooks and directories at hand.

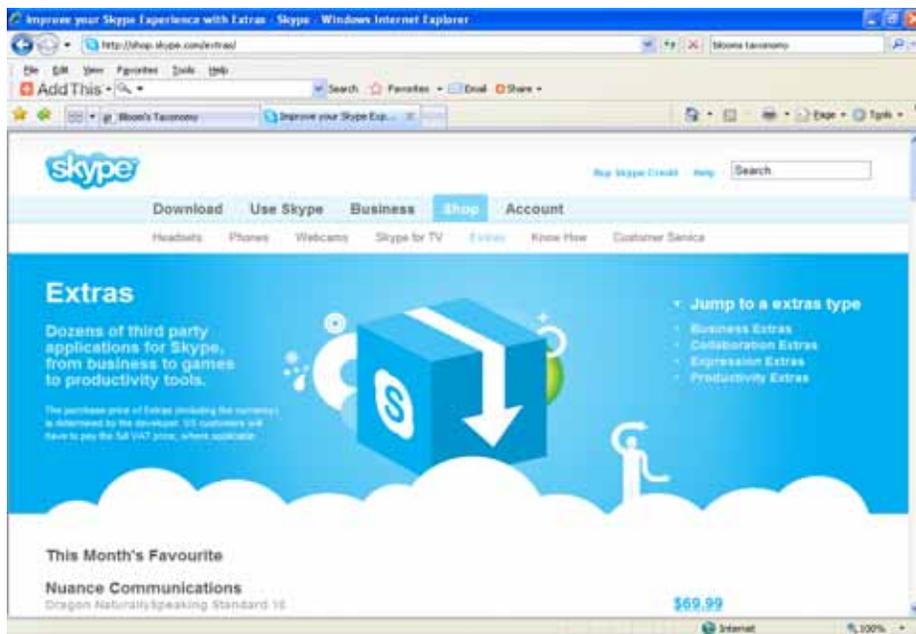
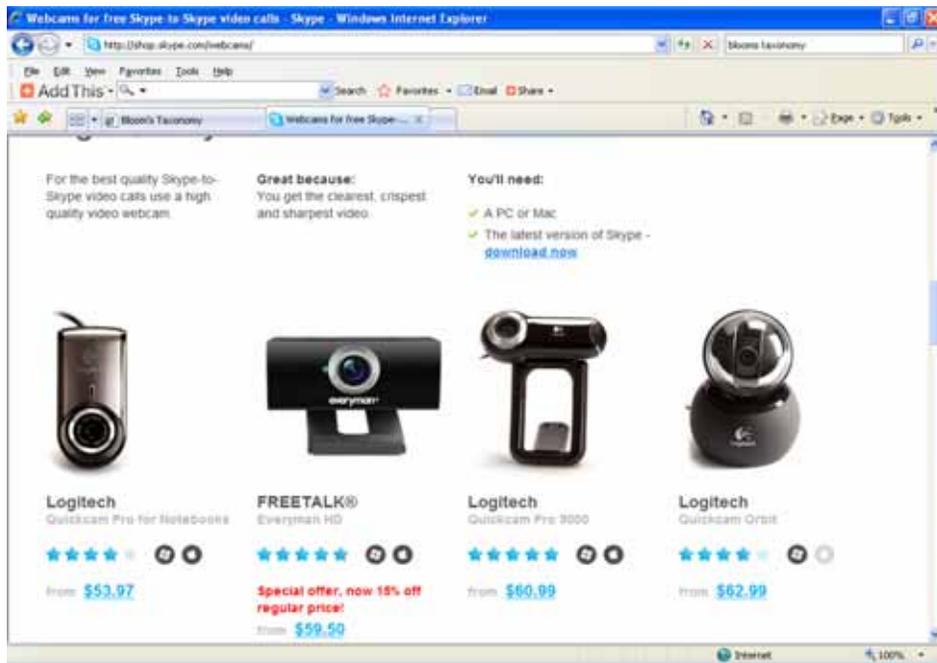
6. Keep notes. As with any advising contact you may be asked to remember the content of the conversation.

a. Before you close a chat window, copy and paste the conversation into a word document.

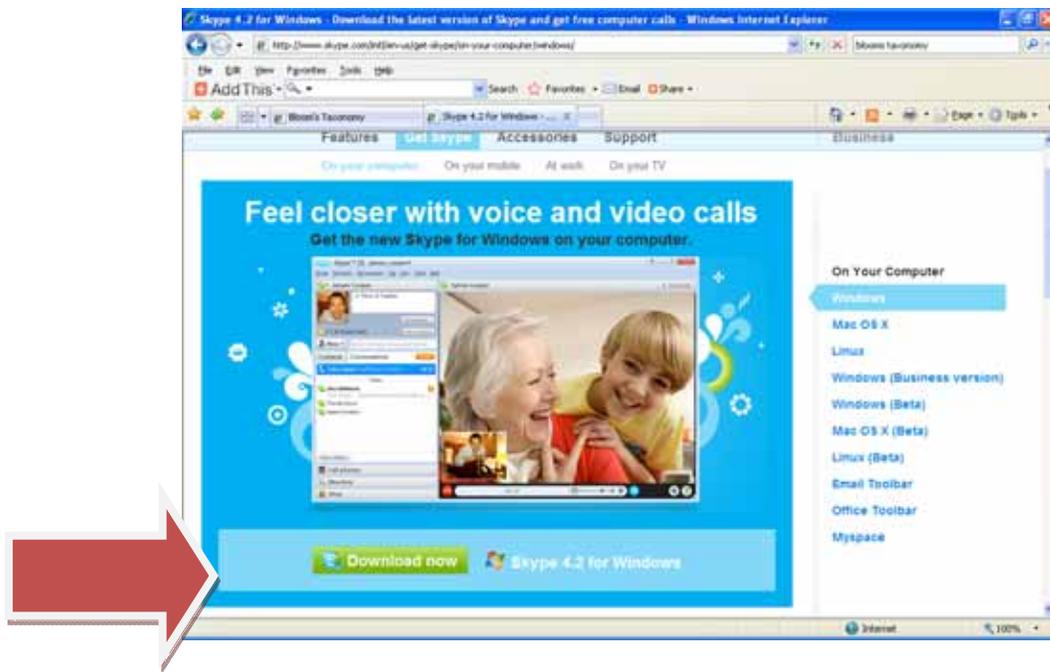
b. Make a folder on your desktop and name it something that makes sense like Meebo Contacts

c. Save the word document in that folder using the name of the student as the name of the folder. (If your contact was anonymous, use the content of the question/answer as the name of the document. You might be able to copy and paste that same answer into another chat about the same question.)

7. Keep data concerning how many folks access your meebo widget, and the types of inquiries you receive. This data will tell you whether meebo is the right solution or if you might need to tweak another communication flow or tools to communicate more effectively.



Including a session recorder (free).



1. Create an account using your first name, last name, email address. You will create a skype name and password. (Note: Uncheck the “by email” box if you don’t want skype to send you news and promotions.) Click Yes, I agree to begin the download.
2. The information on the next page is just that, information. You do need to pay to use skype. At the bottom of the page there is additional help for the download under “need some help installing skype?” These are the steps including:
 - a. click run to launch the skype setup wizard
 - b. follow the steps
 - c. open skype to sign in and get started. Use the “edit your profile option” under personalize to display your advisor alias rather than your real name if you prefer.
3. Import or enter contacts. This list of contacts may be short but you will need contacts in order to practice.
4. Practice...many people are using skype for video calls. Click Add a Contact to enter an email address for someone you know well enough to invite them to practice video calling with you. If the person is not on skype, you can invite them through by using this step.
5. Invite students (F2F) to use skype . Make it an option for students at a distance. If you don’t make your own appointments, develop a script for your schedulers that will help them remember to offer the option to appropriate students.

[Managing Electronic Communication Technologies for More Effective Advising](#)

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Introduction

The adoption of electronic communication technologies over the past decade has changed the nature of advisors' daily work. Voice mail, e-mail, and Web sites were introduced with the promise of helping us connect to our students. Judging from the flood of student contact these technologies produced, it can be said they have been successful. Most of us are drowning in incoming e-mail messages with overflowing inboxes and blinking lights on our voice mail. Responding effectively to student inquiries requires an integrated managed use of these technologies. This article offers suggestions for advisors seeking to better manage these electronic technologies while responding to their students' often times repetitive requests.

Repetitive Requests

Good advising has many elements. One of these elements is the ability to cheerfully and accurately communicate the same message over and over again. Working in bureaucratic structures has ensured that this characteristic of our work will always be present. Most advisors recognize that the repetition of stating the rules, the procedures, the course sequences, etc. is an important and necessary part of our work. Long before the latest necessity of using technology in advising, advisors sought a variety of ways to present answers to commonly asked questions. Advisors and their institutions created a plethora of bulletins, publications, and brochures to answer students' questions regarding curriculum, course registration, policies and procedures, and general advice. The idea was to write, print, store and distribute information when it seemed appropriate.

Less than a decade ago, student contact for many advisors, was mainly through appointments or walk-ins. At this personal level of contact, advisors had many types of printed information at their disposal. Providing this printed information was an integral part of most advising interactions. If the student needed additional clarification, the advisor was there to assist. If the student was satisfied with the information received, then the advisor and the student could move on to other topics. These earlier efforts were undertaken by advisors because they sought more effective ways of answering common questions from students, so they might have greater time to answer the more personal or uncommon questions.

With advisors being expected to use a greater repertoire of electronic communication devices, their management has become even more critical. Whereas in the past, most student contacts entered through our office doors, now they arrive electronically in digital formats. Referring student to printed bulletins or brochures is not a viable option in these cases. In today's environment, focusing on how Web pages, e-mail and voice mail technology can be integrated to address repetitive or common student inquiries is imperative for helping both the students and advisors establish better and more effective communication.

Frequently Asked Questions Web Pages

Moving the content of what was once found in yesterday's bulletins and brochures to the Web is critical. Frequently asked questions (FAQ's) web pages allow students to locate the answer to questions without having to speak or write to a particular advisor. It is an information source they can access at any time of the day or night without waiting for a response. FAQ's also serve as a point of reference for advisors addressing common student inquiries. The URL of the FAQ's Web site is a handy bit of information for advisors to keep ready in their e-mail replies to students. For FAQ's to be truly effective, it is important that they address and answer questions that students most often ask.

Compiling your FAQ's will take a concerted effort and collaboration among the staff. A good starting point is by asking staff members to submit questions they have been asked during the previous months along with their responses. Once these questions and answers have been compiled, they can easily be converted for Web use with the assistance of the information technology staff.

Once these FAQ's have been posted, the next step is to ensure that students access them. One way to do this is to provide a link to the FAQ's from your department's home page, add it to a quick index web page from your home page, and provide a link to your FAQ's at the bottom of all your web pages labeled Questions. Examples of FAQ's are found in Table 1.

Providing an e-mail link to a "generic" e-mail address at the bottom of all of your "FAQ responses" would also be very helpful. Students who don't get the answers they seek can contact your office for additional assistance. Assigning the responsibility for answering questions that come in to the generic e-mail address to one or two advisors might be appropriate.

Template Responses For E-mail

The e-mail software packages of Eudora, Netscape, and Microsoft Outlook all have capabilities that permit advisors to write and store template responses. Template responses are written replies that answer specific questions that can be easily saved and retrieved. For this reason, they are best used for repetitive questions. They are similar in nature to FAQ's. By having them in your e-mail repertoire, advisors can easily access and use them in responses to the numerous common e-mail inquiries that they receive. Writing template responses is rather simple and offers advisors an opportunity to create many specialized messages. Once you become familiar with the technical process, which will be addressed shortly, you will need to compose and save the responses. The topics of the templates should reflect your replies to the most common student requests you receive. Some of these topics might be:

- process to add or drop a course;
- a URL link to an open course Web page;
- campus resources grouped by a common categories such as career or study skill resources with the necessary contact information;
- procedures for making an appointment;
- your e-mail policy;

- reminders regarding departmental course offerings, or specialized services;
- referrals to FAQs;
- or, phone numbers and explanation for leaving clear voice mail messages or directions to your FAX machine.

It is important to remember that each of your written responses should address a singular issue. This will make it the easier to assemble them for a response that answers multiple inquires from a student. For example let us say a students sends you an e-mail inquiry such as "I got closed out of two of my classes this semester. I need to sign up for two more real quickly to be full-time. Can you help? - Pete"

Your response to the student, compiled from your template responses might be:

"Dear Pete,

Access to adding a course is still open. You can call 555-5555 to register by phone. If you have difficulty with this process, directions are found at <http://www.howtoregister.html>.

Open courses are listed at <http://www.opencourses.html>. You have access to the system. It is in your best interest to act as quickly as possible.

If you are having difficulty knowing what courses to take, curriculum guides for your major are found at <http://www.curriculum.html>.

If you have any difficulty with these steps, please set up an appointment to see me by calling 555-1111 or e-mail me back as soon as possible.

Thank you,
A.J. Advisor"

In this example, each paragraph of the advisor response can be a separately saved template response. Each of these can be saved under the file names "adding open courses," "open course list," "curriculum guides," and "invitation for an appointment." In compiling this response, only the student's name needed to be added.

Template responses are not meant as a substitute for good advising. In the example above, the advisor might well be aware that "Pete" needs special attention before registering. A special template message can be developed for this contingency and the file named "intervention".

"Dear Pete,

You have been locked out of registration. Before you enroll, you need to see me for an appointment. Please set up an appointment as soon as possible by calling 555-1111. We really need to talk soon.

I am looking forward to seeing you.

A.J. Advisor"

A short cut to identifying topics and writing responses might already exist for most advisors if they have saved past responses to students. By going back and looking at these saved messages, advisors have an easily identified source for topics and text to use for responses. If messages have not been deliberately saved, it might also be the time to check the trash bin in your e-mail software. This could be a case when not dumping the trash has saved you some valuable time and effort.

Most advisors will quickly discover that template responses will need some editing once they are used to response to student inquiries. Issues of grammar, text flow, and individualizing responses may need some editing. While initially this process may seem a little tedious, many advisors will find that they can quickly adapt and that the speed and quality of their responses improves in terms of composition, grammar, and information provided.

Creating Template Responses

Before discussing how to create template response in three different software packages, two cautionary notes must be sounded. Most of the lighter versions of these software packages do not include the capabilities necessary to write and store template responses. The lighter versions are often the least expensive versions of these software packages and the ones that are most often loaded as free on to the computer at the time of purchase. Also, different versions of these software packages may vary in terms of their procedures. Procedures for creating template responses described in this article are related to specific versions of the software. Modifying the procedural steps may be necessary based on your version of the software.

In Eudora, versions 4.2 and 5.0, creating template responses is done through the tools section at the stationery function.

1. Tools menu, choose Stationery. This will cause the Stationery Window to appear.
2. Right-click anywhere inside the Stationery window to select the drop-down menu and choose New. Eudora opens a new composition window.
3. Write or paste the text you want to save as a template response to student e-mail inquiries into the message body.
4. From the File menu, choose Save As Stationery. The Save as Stationery dialog box is displayed. Enter a file name and click Save to save the stationery file.

Choosing the right file name is important. For example, if the message is to inform a student how and when to pay fees, your file name should be titled "paying fees." This simplicity will save you time and confusion later. The file is saved to your Stationery folder. You should see the file

appear in the stationery directory. Details for these steps are also summarized with graphics, under "[How to use stationery](#)".

Now that you have made template responses, how do you use them to reply to students' e-mails? The Eudora Web site, unfortunately, offers two less-than-perfect ways for advisors to use saved responses from your stationery files for practical advising purposes for several reasons. With one suggested approach, the advisor's selected template response will appear below the student's request, not above it. This is not standard e-mail practice. Students might not detect your response, which could lead to a flurry of additional e-mails, thus defeating the purpose and effectiveness of this effort. The second approach also limits an advisor to only one template response. The second approach limitation is disadvantageous to an advisor who may want to include several different template responses in a reply to the student.

A more functional way of using saved responses in Eudora stationery appears at first blush to be a little more awkward. This approach involves copying the text of your template responses from your stationery files and pasting it into your response to a student's inquiries. The advantage of this approach is that your reply is addressed to the student; you can paste your response before the student's inquiry; and you can include multiple responses from your stationery file that let you individualize your response to the student better by addressing a variety of his or her concerns. To do this:

1. Click the reply button to the student's e-mail inquiry. A response window will appear.
2. Next go to tools, with the left mouse key and click open the stationery file from the scroll down menu.
3. Click and open the stationary file that contains the template response you want.
4. Move your cursor to the beginning of the text in the open window.
5. Hold on to the left mouse key and drag the cursor to the end of the text.
6. Click on the right mouse key and scroll down the menu and select copy.
7. Close the stationery window and your response to the student's inquiry should still be there.
8. Place the cursor at the beginning of the text, click on the right mouse key, and select paste from the scroll down window.
9. The template text should appear before the text of the student's inquiry as well as having the headers of "to," "from," and "subject" completed. You can add more template text as you see fit to respond to the student's e-mail by repeating the process.

Cutting and pasting is not as high-tech as many would want. To its advantage, it does balance easy storage of common responses with the ability to individualize them to specific student inquiries. Also, this basic approach can be used with other software.

Templates in MS Outlook

With Microsoft Outlook, common responses can be created and saved as Drafts, and then opened for the purpose of copying and pasting into student inquiries.

To create a template in MS Outlook:

1. Click on the New Message icon in the menu bar to open a blank message window
2. Leave the To: input box blank
3. Create the title of the template in the Subject area
4. Write the text in the Message window
5. Save
6. Under File, select Move to Folder and select Drafts as the destination

To reply using a template:

1. Click on the Reply icon to open a message window
2. Open the Drafts file and select the appropriate draft title or titles
3. Copy and Paste selected files into the message window of the reply
4. Select Send under File

Templates in Netscape Communicator

To create a template:

1. Select New Message from the Netscape menu bar to open a message window
2. Leaving the To: area blank, enter the title in the Subject input box
3. Write the text of the message in the message input box
4. Select Save As... under File on the top menu bar and select Template

To reply using a template:

1. Click Reply in mail menu bar to open a message window
2. Open the desired template response
3. Copy and paste into the message window of the new e-mail message
4. Send the message

What if you have a light version of one of these programs that prevents you from creating and storing template responses? If this is the case, there is an easy way to address this perceived difficulty: you can always write and save common written responses in a word processing file. By creating a short cut to the document on your desktop, you can then easily pull the document up and use it with e-mail.

Voice Mail:

Voice mail is often promoted as having one's own receptionist. Depending on the configuration of your voice mail system, it can take your calls when you do not want to be disturbed, record messages from callers when you are unavailable, screen your calls, and then let you review your calls so you can establish a priority for returning them. Many voice mail messages express the concern that the recipient has missed your call and asks the caller to leave a message. Better integration to the other means of electronic communication available to the advisor is easy to do. By tailoring your voice mail messages, advisors can help screen calls and provide timely information to students.

"I am sorry I am unable to answer your call right now. If you wish to make an appointment to see me for registration, you might first want to review your options at our Web site's FAQs located at http://college_office/FAQs.html. Here the 1) process for registering, 2) how to acquire closed window access, and 3) general curriculum requirements are all found. If you still need to see me, please call the receptionist at 555-5555 to set up an appointment. If you need to discuss another issues with me, please leave a message and I will get back in touch with you as quickly as possible. Please speak slowly and clearly state your request, when I can reach you, and your phone number. I also respond to e-mail inquires. I can also be reached at advisor@university.edu. Thank you."

Advisors are familiar with the flow of work in their offices. There is a time for registration, schedule adjustments, and special events. By tailoring message to these traditional periods, accurate and timely information can be relayed to students. By including referrals to your other electronic resources, greater depth can be provided than what can be recorded in the limited allocation of space provided on your voice mail response.

Conclusion

Integrating your electronic response to answer common student inquires provides an excellent opportunity for advisor to use their collective wisdom to brainstorm possibilities, review them, then decide on responses. By keeping a focus on how these three technologies can be used in collaboration with one another, an integrated approach can be developed to better serve students and reduce advisor stress to respond to an overflow of common inquires. Working collectively can also improve the quality of responses to students, by using more polished responses that have been considered and well crafted as opposed to quickly considered replies. Training will be a critical. Introducing the capabilities of e-mail packages, voice mail, and FAQ web sites may be a novelty to some advisors. By combining technical training with responses to common student inquires, training will be more effective and practical. Finally, administrators and advisors need to weigh whether purchasing the least expensive versions of software and models of communication technologies, those with the fewest capabilities, limit advisors' ability to effectively manage their student contacts. These small, but practical steps can help those advisors who want to improve their immediate work effectiveness and sanity.

Examples of FAQ's:

1. Why should I see an academic advisor?
2. I already know what I want to major in and what courses I need to take; what could an advisor do for me?
3. What do I need to do to make the most of my advising session?
4. What can I expect from my advisor?
5. May I contact my advisor via e-mail if I have questions?
6. Why do I need to take courses in the liberal arts and sciences?
7. Do I have to have a major to graduate?
8. How do I change my major? What is the procedure?
9. What major is recommended for students who wish to pursue medical school or law school in the future?
10. I am enrolled in the College of Engineering. Who do I contact to help me select my classes?
11. How do I find information on what CLEP scores are accepted for subject exams?
12. I registered for my classes today. What about books? When should I expect my schedule to be mailed?

13. How will I know if I am in academic difficulty? What can I do?
14. How do I compute my academic average - GPA?
15. What are my options in fulfilling the English Proficiency requirement?
16. I am dissatisfied with my Math Qualifying Exam score. How do I go about re-taking the exam and improving my placement?
17. What courses does the Math Qualifying Exam place me into?
18. I have completed calculus. Have I met the Math proficiency requirement?

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Web sites with information related to this topic:

- 32 Most Important [E-mail Etiquette Tips](#)
- Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner [Guidelines for workplace e-mail](#). Note the section "Technical Realities of E-mail Use".

Cite this resource using APA style as:

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<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/electronic.htm>

[Instant Messaging: Powerful Flexibility and Presence](#)

[Wes Lipschultz](#) and [Terry Musser](#)
The Pennsylvania State University



In a 2005 report from the *Pew Internet and American Life Project* about teens and their use of technology, teenagers were found to prefer new technology, such as instant and text messaging (IM), for

communicating with friends and family (Lenhart, 2005). They also state that email is still very present in teens' lives, but that they use it as a more formal means of communication. Carnevale reports similar findings in his article *E-Mail is for Old People* (2006) in terms of student use of e-mail only to communicate with professors. While many colleges and universities use email as an official means of communicating with students, the salience of IM in students' lives as more than just a distraction really hit home for us when one of the best students we have ever encountered (a 4.0 student majoring in biology who was president of our student council) said she plans her life around IM. Perhaps the draw of IM is in its unintrusive immediacy coupled with the ability to see when a friend's or relative's "consciousness" is present or away, and what the person is doing when they are away (see "Definitions & Features" below for more on "presence information"). IM, then, represents another case study in the potential evolution of our profession; if advisors want to engage students, to build meaningful relationships with them, then they must come to understand the methods of communication that students naturally find engaging.

How we define an advisor's understanding of IM is what is crucial. Understanding does not mean mimicking student use of IM, nor does it mean harnessing IM as a kind of online walk-in system. Such examples hint at a taxonomy of how IM is being used in higher education, and while such a taxonomy describes useful facets of the phenomenon that may be perfectly relevant in some advising settings, it does not capture the full scope of IM and its potential. To capture this essence, advisors need to learn what IM is technologically, what its features are, and what is known about it as a communications modality. The reward for these efforts is to be able to use our expertise as educators coupled with a sound grasp of IM to control and justify if, when, and how IM should be incorporated into an advisor's specific advising context. This article attempts to lay groundwork for such endeavors. This approach is consistent with a long-standing view advocated by the authors on how to go about incorporating technology into the profession of academic advising (Lipschultz, 1999, Lipschultz & Musser, 2006, Lipschultz & Leonard, 2007).

Definition & Features of IM

Instant Messaging is a type of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), which falls within the domain of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT, formerly described as IT). This simply means that IM is a method of communication that enables users to share digitally-based information (text, audio, video) with each other over a network of computers (such as the Internet). All CMCs have in common that they are place-independent, that unlike a face-to-face conversation, the communicators do not have to be in the same place to communicate. People can also use different CMCs for similar purposes (you can, for example, make plans to go see a movie using IM, email, or chat). What distinguishes CMCs from one another, then, are their predominant patterns of use along a few key dimensions:

- time - email is asynchronous (one person sends an email at 3 a.m. , the recipient responds at noon three days later) while IM is synchronous (see "IM as a communication modality" for details)
- number - email and IM involve one person communicating with others, chats and bulletin boards involve more than one person talking with multiple people
- familiarity - you can negotiate identity before accepting an instant message, whereas chats are often designed to be anonymous, and identity cannot typically be negotiated before receiving an email (though some universities have tackled this problem by having their own email systems).

Human beings have a remarkable capacity for adapting tools to new uses for which they were not originally designed, so email, for example, can be used in a synchronous fashion, and bulletin boards can be used for one-on-one communications. In the case of CMCs, such adaptations can often be less than elegant, however, because users are then not capitalizing on the strengths a particular medium affords; using email frequently for synchronous communications would be like using a Volkswagen Beetle to transport a junior high soccer team to away games for an entire season. The strengths of IM at first glance, then, come to bear in synchronous one-on-one communications where the communicators know each other. A closer examination of the features of IM, however, reveals it to be a CMC that is elegantly adaptable, perhaps the most flexible mainstream CMC created to date.

The first feature of IM a new user learns about is the screenname. Each user must come up with a unique screenname by which she/he will be identified when communicating with another IM user. If choosing a commercial IM package such as AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), new users often must be creative in coming up with a unique name, as the user base for a major commercial IM package can number hundreds of millions of people. A screenname can express a personality (bikergrl23, angstboy15) or an actual name (Lipschultz55). With a screenname for identity, a person can then IM other people, but to do so, another feature comes into play - the buddy list. IM users typically need to share their screennames with others or have other screennames shared with them in order for an interaction to begin. A buddy list is a kind of ad hoc directory of all of those people a user has either sent an IM to or received an IM from. Users interacting for the first time have the choice of accepting or rejecting an IM, similar to a handshake, and once the users have "shook hands" then they appear on each other's buddy lists. Buddy lists can be sorted into categories (friends, family, coworkers), and people can be deleted from a buddy list and their screenname blocked from interacting with the user. Some IM software packages even allow users to add cell phone numbers as buddies; users can IM the phone number, and the IM is translated into a text message on the recipient's cell phone (this then becomes a cross-platform communication rather than an IM session). Whatever the combination of cell phone numbers and other IM users in a person's buddy list, that person also has the capability of holding IM sessions with more than one buddy at the same time.

The negotiation of identity and power to block and control interactions afforded by this buddy list system stems perhaps from another defining feature of IM, its most unique attribute: presence information. Just as when we are aware of someone's presence when they physically enter a room, when users look at their buddy lists, the lists indicate which buddies are "present" online and which are offline, and noises can signal when a buddy's presence comes online or goes offline. Even when a person is typing an IM response is able to be indicated to the other IM user before that response is sent, indicating not only the presence of the other person, but that the person's consciousness is attending to your message. Relatedly, users can remain online but set away messages stating where they are, what they are doing, how they are feeling, etc. So if angstboy15 is a buddy who happens to be online but set an away message, pointing to his screenname on a buddy list would cause his away message to display ("I am at lunch" or "I am wondering why I am here"). Users can also set up profiles for their screennames, and these profiles can be associated sounds, backgrounds, graphics, quotes, and even avatars (computer-based visual representations of a user's virtual persona). When such rich multimedia profiles are coupled with presence information, IM users can maintain fairly tangible psychological connections with those people who are on their buddy lists.

IM as a communication modality

There are many IM software packages (AOL Instant Messenger, Skype, Windows Live Messenger, Yahoo! Messenger, to name a few with large user bases), but the features previously described can be considered features defining the medium rather than proprietary expressions of it. These features, taken in sum, paint a picture of a mode of communications that represents "a new style of linguistic discourse" (Baron, 2005A, p. 14). Baron, a linguistics professor at American University interested in CMCs since the 1990's, conducted an analysis of 26 IM conversations between undergraduates (and recent graduates) of American University involving 2185 IM transmissions and 11,718 distinct words. She concluded that IM language looks more like speech than writing, but that speech within IM communications manifests itself very differently than in face-to-face conversations; the norm among IM users in college in the US is for IM conversations to be peripheral rather than central - IM users are multitasking, doing a variety of activities, while holding IM conversations (2005A).

Furthermore, the presence information feature of IM adds a unique dimension to the analysis - presence information allows what typically is considered a synchronous form of communication to become asynchronous (Baron, 2005B) on the fly. Users set away messages not knowing who among their buddies will read them or when, but they are nonetheless read. One undergraduate stated to Baron that "even if they are not chatting [on IM], you can still know all about someone's life by reading their away messages" (2005B). Nardi et. al. (2000) describe the IM space as a communication zone, one that can be flexed from realtime to an extended period of time, depending on the availability of those on a person's

buddy list. IM then, as a communication modality, is unique in its extreme flexibility along virtually every parameter relevant to communication between people. Nardi et. al. state that IM "redresses the fundamental communication asymmetry in informal communication. Instead of conversations taking place at the convenience of the initiator, IM allows genuine social negotiation about whether and when to talk" (2000 p. 84). For these reasons, Baron calls IM "language under the radar" (2005A), meaning it is potentially ever-present background communication over which the "volume" can be raised and lowered. To throw our hats in the ring, we found "opportunistic communication" to help capture the essence of this unique dynamic.

Finally, both Nardi et. al. (2000) and Baron (2005B) ascribe a social connectedness function to the presence information feature of IM that appears to be unique among CMCs (but is perhaps more central in social networking spaces that include CMC elements, such as "facebook" and "myspace"). Nardi et. al. interviewed adults using IM in work settings, and one participant epitomized the idea: "To me it's just fascinating to know that someone else is somewhere else doing something while you're doing something. You feel like you're in this world together so this creates a little universe." Think of the relationship some people have with their grandmothers. They talk to their grandmothers when they can, but even when not talking, they know when grandma is going to the doctor, when she is travelling to see her brother, etc. How grandma is treated in this example is a socially accepted means of being fairly close with someone without being physically near them much. For those IM users who do choose to use away messages to reflect their status, both when they really are away from the computer and are still at it, IM is a subtle yet powerful tool for fostering a level of social intimacy from a distance that would otherwise be thwarted by geography. Speaking as users of IM ourselves, this presence information makes IM feel instantly and intuitively far more personal than email, yet because it is "opportunistic communication," it does not feel intrusive at all.

Using IM in advising settings

Instant messaging (IM) is already in use in many higher education settings and for several different purposes. In light of IM as a flexible, opportunistic, and personal CMC, here are some ideas on both current uses of IM in advising and new ideas to try. This list is by no means exhaustive:

Advisor contact with other professional staff

- Quick advisor-to-advisor conversation - in our unit, an internal IM system (synchronous communication) has allowed our receptionist to announce a student's arrival or quickly find someone (presence information) for an appointment or telephone call.
- Consistency of advising information between offices - IM is especially helpful in a larger advising network system because it allows advisors from various locations to contact each other quickly to verify information, give other advisors a heads up on referrals, or just to keep in touch. In smaller settings, IM could be shared between faculty and professional advisors.
- Interrupting busy administrators without interrupting them - deans, department heads, advising directors, etc. may have time-sensitive information and/or answers advisors need when working with students. They may be on the phone or in meetings, and IM can be used to make them aware of the need for information/answers without directly interrupting the flow of their interactions (language under the radar).
- Project planning - we have even conducted NACADA business with colleagues across the country via IM (place-independent, multitasking).

Student initiates contact with an advisor

- Intake or quick questions with students - a current popular approach has been to have an advisor assigned to answer IM questions within specific virtual "walk-in" hours. Given what we know of presence information and that IM is viewed opportunistically, perhaps rotating times which can be modified on the fly based on advisor availability would work just as well; if the walk-in advisor

screenname was on students' buddy lists, they would know when the advisor was available based on presence information.

- Accessing a student's assigned advisor - advisors can include their IM screenname on their advising syllabi, Web pages, business cards, Facebook profiles, etc. Because of presence information, away messages, and the opportunistic nature of IM, students can know when their advisor is online and free to talk, when their advisor is online but busy, and when their advisor is not online. Even if an advisor forgets to post an away message and would not be able to respond to an IM or would take time to respond, student IM usage patterns would suggest they would not necessarily be offended; students assume multitasking is occurring during IM use, and those other tasks may have precluded the ability to respond to the IM.
- Advising chatterbots - according to Wikipedia, "a chatterbot is a computer program designed to simulate an intelligent conversation with one or more human users via auditory or textual methods." *SmarterChild* is an example of an AOL Instant Messenger chatterbot with which anyone can have a quasi-conversation, but it is primarily useful for disseminating factual information. A techno-savvy advisor could design an advising chatterbot for students to IM for answers to simple advising informational questions (ex. when the drop/add period ends).

Advisor initiates contact with student

- Outreach with at-risk students - if a student does not show up for an advising appointment, the advisor could check to see if the student is online and send a quick "What happened? Is everything alright?" If the advisor does not have the student's screenname, the IM could still be sent to the student as a text message if a cell phone number was on record.
- Social pressure to stay on task - there are some students who benefit from regular meetings to help them with time management; some first-year seminars even require students to journal their time. It might be worth becoming IM buddies with such students, and asking them to use their away messages to document how they are spending their time.
- A kinder, gentler, more personal electronic newsletter - for universities who send announcements to students via email, an alternative or additional way to introduce information to students' consciousnesses would be for an advisor to post information and/or links to information in her/his away messages (ex. "access this Web site: <http://example.url.edu> to set up an appointment with me").

Conclusion

Our goal in providing the information in this article is to put the horse before the cart -- what you should research and consider BEFORE diving in to this relatively new communication modality with students and colleagues -- as well as some ideas for how you might attempt to use this medium. We end with a few practical logistical considerations to consider if you decide to implement IM use in your own advising setting:

- Develop your personal or unit philosophy about using this form of communication either with colleagues or students. In other words, think through the possible pros and cons BEFORE getting started.
- Determine who you will share your screenname with and/or how you will "collect" screennames from students or colleagues. Will you email your screenname to those you want to IM thus allowing them to decide if they want to IM you? (They can respond by IM'ing you or by simply sending you their screenname -- or not!) Will you pilot this with a sub-set of colleagues or students?
- Establish parameters in terms of your own availability to students and the type of discussions that will be permitted.
- Set boundaries concerning writing styles if that is important to you. Will you accept abbreviations like lol (laugh out loud), misspellings, and no punctuation, or would you prefer a more formalized writing format?

- Decide how to manage the documenting of your IM conversations if that is required at your institution. You can copy and paste entire conversations or you can paraphrase them depending on your own record keeping system.
- In our experience using IM with advisees, we do find it necessary to ask the student to come in to talk in person if the discussion is too complex for IM or free time is short. However, there are also times where all immediate business with the student can be concluded via this format. Perhaps examples of successful IM advising sessions could be shared and discussed with colleagues.
- Advisors who use IM in their personal lives may wish to have a different screenname for advising purposes to keep the two uses separate and more easily manageable. Relatedly, advisors could recommend that students do the same, but this may erode students' natural use of this medium.
- Consider security and confidentiality issues. How will you identify who you are IM'ing? We simply ask "Who is this?" if we don't remember the screenname. You may not wish to disclose information over this medium, but what about discussing confidential issues disclosed to YOU via IM?
- Experiment with it. You can download most IM software packages from the Internet for free. AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) seems to be the most popular package used by students and can be downloaded at this site: www.aol.com.

The take-away big idea is that if we try to force advisees to communicate with us using a new technology within a set of rules and time constraints that are at odds with the functionality of the new medium, then we risk nullifying the very affordances and uniqueness that make it a potentially powerful new way to connect with advisees. Working effectively with such a new technology can be a nuanced task for some advisors. It may seem simple at first glance, because the technology is not something students are consciously thinking about, but it is much like learning a new language (Prensky, 2001). Students have grown up with IM, so their use of it is naturally sophisticated and fluid. Those of us who did not grow up speaking IM need to consciously and systematically learn it. In other words, we do not need to change what we want to say to students, just how we say it.

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