

Running Head: Using Facebook to Enhance Academic Advising

Using Facebook to Enhance Academic Advising

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to show that the use of social media, specifically Facebook, can be a valuable tool in assisting college and university students in the area of academic advising. The research is based on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement, which states that the greater a student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development (Astin, 1985). As college and university students are relying on the Internet to make connections with other people every day, they are placing an increasing demand on their academic institutions to keep up the pace. A questionnaire will be administered to students coming into the Academic Advising Center at Florida International University to determine their attitudes towards Facebook, university email, and academic advising. It is expected that the results of the questionnaire will show that college and university students check their Facebook accounts more frequently than their email accounts, and that they would be very receptive to getting supplemental academic advising through Facebook.

Introduction

Today's traditional-aged college students have never known a time when personal computers did not exist. This growing technology has helped shape their lives in the areas of friendship, shopping, music, video, research and writing skills. Technology has also played a prominent role in the selection of which college or university to attend (Noel-Levitz, 2006). These students expect the level of "*customer service*" from their respective colleges to be on par with that provided on the Web. Unfortunately, most higher education institutions are lagging

behind in regard to their use of technology. Also, as the student population grows, the number of academic advisors typically does not grow proportionately as resources continue to shrink at colleges and universities. Factor in additional obstacles such as student work schedules, limited advisor appointment availability, and the value students place on the need for individual advising, today's academic advisors are challenged to reach out to students through the virtual world in which they spend so much time (Junco, R., & Mastrodicasa, J., 2007).

The purpose of this study is to determine student perspectives regarding the use of Facebook as a tool in academic advising. This study is based on Astin's (1985) student involvement theory.

Literature Review

The Net Generation

College students are relying on the Internet to make connections with other people every day. As the Internet has developed and grown, so have the capabilities for interaction. They use the Internet and instant messaging (IM), consult Wikipedia, play online games, maintain and regularly update blogs, and download music more than individuals from any other generation (Fox & Madden, 2009; Horrigan & Rainie, 2005; Jones & Fox, 2009; Junco & Cotton, 2011; Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007; Rainie & Tancer, 2007). Social networking sites, a group of Web sites that provide people with the opportunity to create an online profile and to share their profile with others, are a part of college students' regular daily lives (Timm, D. M., & Duven, C. J., 2008). Today's college students, the Net Generation, have incorporated technology into their everyday lives in terms of communication with others. They use the Internet, e-mail, instant

messaging, blogs, and social networking websites like Facebook at rates older generations would have trouble comprehending (Junco, R., & Cole-Avent, G. A., 2008). The Net Generation is considered to be traditional-aged college students who started their academic collegiate career no earlier than 2000. Because technology plays such a prominent part in their lives, universities and colleges must focus on how to better meet and satisfy students with the “non-traditional” services they must provide (Junco, R., & Mastrodicasa, J., 2007).

Facebook

Facebook is a social networking site that gives people an opportunity to create an online profile and then to share their profile with whomever they choose (Timm, D. M., & Duven, C. J., 2008). In addition, Facebook allows their members to create “*like*” pages, which do not require permission to join or follow. Some of the more typical users to create a like page would include businesses, athletes, musicians, actors, colleges, universities, politicians, as well as other public figures. Some of the main advantages of a like page include networking to drive customers to their business, creating a resource, creating contests that include participation, and targeting the proper demographic. For individuals or groups who are often in the public spotlight, a like page is an excellent vehicle for their fans to follow them, without the individual or group having the responsibility of responding back (if they choose).

Facebook currently has more than 400 million active users, with fifty percent of those active users logging onto the site in any given day (Facebook, 2010). Over eighty-five percent of four-year college and university students currently use Facebook (Facebook, 2008). Among its many features, Facebook integrates personal pages (static pages within a template), instant messaging, wall posts (asynchronous chats), picture and video uploading, news feeds and blogs

(Heiberger, G., & Harper, R., 2008). A blog is simply a web log, or a journal-style website. These blogs are organized in reverse chronological order. Blogs can be created very quickly and with very little technical savvy. They are very easy to personalize and to update. Blogs are a convenient way for instructors to post announcements, facilitate discussions and link to class resources. For the academic advisor, it can be used as an administrative tool (Nackerud, S., & Scaletta, K., 2008).

Technology and Education

College students rarely differentiate between real world and online communication. They often discuss how they were “talking to a friend” when they were actually referring to an online conversation. A nationwide study found that over 97% of college students owned a computer; over 94% owned a cell phone and over 90% had high-speed Internet access in their residence (Junco, R., & Cole-Avent, G. A., 2008). College students expect their respective academic institutions to use the latest technology to reach out to them, but these institutions aren’t always up for the challenge. Of one thousand college-bound high school juniors, Noel-Levitz (2006) found that over 70% had an interest in exchanging instant messages with an admissions counselor. Instead of embracing technology to enhance educational and social outcomes, colleges have typically focused on and reacted to the inappropriate use of this technology, such as “chatting” with friends during class time. (Junco, R., & Cole-Avent, G. A., 2008).

Importance

Academic advising is one of the most important and influential ways that can connect a college student (especially a first year student) to the institution (Junco, R., & Mastrodicasa, J.,

2007). Academic advisors help to guide students in terms of their educational careers as well as their individual decision making. This is accomplished by exploring the values, interests and abilities of the students. This can be extremely challenging because of the high involvement parents have on their Net Generation children. The influence that parents have in terms of goal setting can often intimidate students, and thus hamper the progress of students in the areas of decision making and critical thinking skills. One of the more important components of academic advising is repetition. Institutional policies and deadlines are two examples of the kind of information that must be reinforced, since many students may be hoping for exemptions on these policies (taking an “*easier to get forgiveness than permission*” approach). Because the Net Generation is using technology at a vastly increasing rate, academic advisors must be prepared to communicate in some non-traditional ways, which embrace technology (Junco, R., & Mastrodicasa, J., 2007). College students are less interested in using email and more interested in real-time communication vehicles such as texting and instant messaging (IM) (Cotten, S. R., 2008). In addition, academic advising has been perceived as one of the weakest areas in terms of student services; according to Astin (1985), undergraduates are more likely to be dissatisfied with one-on-one services like advisement, career counseling, and financial aid than with many other aspects of their college life.

Florida International University (FIU) is a leader in the use of web-based resources in its process of enrollment of potential students. They also have the ability to assess the effectiveness of the website content. FIU has implemented Panther Chat, a new IM service that allows students to communicate with registration, admissions and financial aid. Students have the option to receive a transcript of their conversation and complete a satisfaction survey (Salas, G., & Alexander, J. S., 2008). In 2009, FIU created and filled the position of Instructional

Technologist in their Undergraduate Education department. This position is responsible for the planning and effective implementation of technology tools to enhance the learning experience of undergraduate students as it directly relates to academic advising, student progress and development by:

1. Encouraging academic advising activities that take advantage of computer networking capabilities, specifically using internet resources.
2. Evaluating and implementing use of new instructional technology resources including software, web sites, etc.
3. Developing training materials and delivering training sessions on use of instructional technology tools in academic advising.
4. Demonstrating and training advisors/student communities on the use of developed technological tools.
5. Making continuous improvements in processes, techniques, and procedures related to advising and instructional technologies.
6. Making recommendations to the Dean of Undergraduate Education on matters of instructional technology directly related to academic advising and student retention.

For instance, webcams have been installed in the computers of all academic advisors. This enables the advisors to connect to their students when it may not be physically possible for the students to see the advisor in person (e.g. if a student is out of the state and is on academic probation, it is mandatory that he or she speaks with an advisor prior to registration), or simply for student convenience.

The Instructional Technologist at FIU has created a Facebook page for the Academic Advising Center, which currently has over 750 followers (Facebook, 2011). College students are

on the road to becoming adults. Facebook gives them the opportunity to learn and select programs and services that may be beneficial to them. Pages such as the one for the FIU Academic Advising Center also help them prioritize and manage their time wisely, as well as exploring the many options available to them on their campus. As colleges prepare to segue from the traditional to the modern, technology must be embraced, or it will pass them by. Facebook can be a tool for students to be more engaged with their academic advisors on the road of achieving educational excellence.

Procedure

The use of Facebook for academic advising purposes will be a valuable tool for creating student awareness. This hypothesis is based on Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, A. W., 1985). Astin's student involvement theory has five basic postulates:

1. Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various "*objects*." The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination).
2. Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum. Different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifest different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times.
3. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in, say, academic work can be measured quantitatively

(how many hours the student spends studying) and qualitatively (does the student review and comprehend reading assignments, or does the student simply stare at the textbook and daydream)?

4. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program.
5. The effectiveness of an educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement (p. 136).

According to this theory, the greater the student's involvement in college, the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development (Astin, 1985).

Method

A Likert-scale item questionnaire (Appendix A) will be administered to group of undergraduate students attempting to meet with an academic advisor in the Academic Advising Center at Florida International University (FIU). These students will be in the process of completing their general education requirements for the university. The vast majority of these students are traditional college aged first-year students. The questionnaire will be administered by a receptionist as the students sign in and wait in the lobby area to see an advisor. The students will provide informed consent as per University Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. The questionnaires will be anonymous, and student participation will be voluntary. The project will be implemented after obtaining approval of the FIU IRB.

The questionnaire will be administered during two distinct time periods: the first week that advising *begins* for the next upcoming semester and the first week that *registration* begins

for the next upcoming semester. The two time frames selected will be obtained from the academic calendar on the official website of the university.

The selection of the two weeks chosen to conduct the research is designed to capture a large percentage of students seeking advising, and is based on typical student volumes during those times.

Data Analysis

Once the questionnaires have been completed and collected, they will be evaluated and analyzed for the following criteria:

1. Percentage of students who filled out the survey vs. the number of students seen by academic advisors during the stated two-week period.
2. Percentage of students who currently have Facebook accounts compared to national averages.
3. Determination as to whether individual academic advisor Facebook pages are warranted (to allow individual academic advisors to reach out to students they specifically see).
This could make academic advising on Facebook more personal, rather than just having facts presented in a non-interactive manor.
4. To what extent do students believe Facebook can be utilized as a tool for academic advising.

Outcomes

Overall, data from this study will test the hypothesis that Facebook is a valuable tool for academic advisors to use for creating awareness. Given the increased use of Internet technology, students will be very receptive to adding the Academic Advising Center like page, as well as their individual academic advisor(s) professional page(s), to their pages of “likes” on Facebook. Additionally, findings from this study will show that students who presently do not have Facebook pages will be more receptive to joining this social network knowing additional academic assistance is available to them.

The implications for academic advising are a powerful one. Advisors will have the opportunity to provide students with important deadlines in a timely fashion (first day of class, last day to drop and receive a full refund, etc). The immediacy of the medium allows for the type of repetition necessary to ensure student involvement (Astin, 1985). With more conventional methods of communication (college or university website, email, etc.), it is the responsibility of the student to check for information. The use of Facebook will allow academic advisors to go to “*where the students live*” and figuratively hand-deliver information to them on a regular basis. The goal would be to drive the students to the other resources provided by their academic institution in an effort to inform and enhance their college experience.

The limitation to this study is that it focuses on students who have already sought out academic assistance; it will not be representative of the entire population of students attending the college or university.

The impact of the findings of this study will be positive in terms of other academic institutions. As stated before, colleges and universities have typically focused on and reacted to

the inappropriate use of technology rather than embracing it to enhance educational and social outcomes (Junco, R., & Cole-Avent, G. A., 2008). Upon seeing the results of both this research and the implication of the findings, other departments on campus, as well as other colleges and universities may rethink their approaches to the ever-changing world of technology.

Time Line

First Quarter

Implementation of the questionnaire will begin on Tuesday, September 6, 2011. This is the first day that Undergraduate Education advising begins for Spring 2012/Summer 2012 terms. This date has been obtained from the official website of Florida International University. Advising begins on a Tuesday because that Monday (September 5, 2011) is Labor Day, and the university will be closed. To compensate for the shortened week data collection will extend to the following Monday, thus providing five full days of distribution.

Questionnaires for the second week of distribution will begin on Monday, November 7, 2011. This is the first day of official registration for degree-seeking students. The exact times of distribution for both weeks will be 8:00 am until 5:00 pm. These times are in accordance with the hours of operation of the academic advising center.

Second Quarter

Analysis and results of the questionnaires will be conducted by the researcher beginning Monday, January 16, 2012. This date represents the second week of the Spring Semester 2012.

Results of the questionnaire will be completed by April 23, 2012. At this time, a fully detailed report will be submitted to the Director of Academic Advisement, the Dean of Undergraduate Education and the Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education.

Third Quarter

A meeting will be scheduled the week of May 14, 2012 with the Director of Academic Advisement, the Assistant Directors of Academic Advisement, the Dean of Undergraduate Education, the Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education, and the Instructional Technologist. The meeting will discuss the results of the questionnaire and the possible implications. The committee will have until Thursday, June 21, 2012 to propose any suggestions in regards to the results. Additional meetings are expected to take place during the course of the semester.

Fourth Quarter

The completed report to the NACADA Research Committee is expected to be submitted by Monday, July 23, 2012. Periodic reports will be submitted during each quarter as well.

Budget

The printing associated with the data collection and analysis will be the only cost associated with this study (approximately \$100).

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Appendix A
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you currently have a Facebook page/account?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. If you answered “No” to question 1, which answer most closely matches your reason?
 - a. It’s a waste of time
 - b. Do not see any benefit
 - c. Haven’t gotten around to signing up yet
 - d. Don’t really know enough about it
 - e. Other (please explain)

(If you answered “No” to question 1, please skip to question 12)

3. About how many hours on average do you spend on Facebook?
 - a. Less than one hour
 - b. 1 – 2 hours
 - c. 2 – 4 hours
 - d. 4 – 6 hours
 - e. More than 6 hours

4. Which times are you most likely to visit Facebook? (circle all that apply)
 - a. 6 am – 10 am.
 - b. 10 am – 12 pm (noon)
 - c. 12 pm (noon) – 4 pm.
 - d. 4 pm – 8 pm
 - e. 8 pm – 12 am (midnight)
 - f. 12 am (midnight) – 6 am

5. During the course of the week, when are you most likely to visit Facebook?
 - a. Weekdays
 - b. Weekends
 - c. Both weekdays and weekends.

6. Are you currently following any profiles or pages associated with FIU?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

7. If you answered "Yes" to question 6, which profiles or pages are you following? (Circle all that apply).
 - a. Professor personal page
 - b. Professor professional page
 - c. Page for specific course I am enrolled in
 - d. Page for specific department (Journalism, Business, Athletics, etc.)
 - e. General interest page (FIU news)
 - f. Academic Advising Center
 - g. Academic Advisor's page
 - h. Answered "No" to question 6

8. Are you aware that the Academic Advising Center at FIU has a Facebook page?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. How likely would you be to follow the Academic Advising Center at FIU in Facebook?
 - a. Already following
 - b. Very likely
 - c. Likely
 - d. Possibly
 - e. Not very likely
 - f. Not likely at all

10. How likely would you be to follow your Academic Advisor if he/she put up a professional Facebook page?
 - a. Already following
 - b. Very likely
 - c. Likely
 - d. Possibly
 - e. Not very likely
 - f. Not likely at all

11. How receptive would you be to getting personal advising through Facebook?
 - a. Very receptive
 - b. Receptive
 - c. Not very receptive
 - d. Not receptive at all
 - e.

12. How often do you visit your academic advisor and/or the Academic Advising Center at FIU?
- a. This is my first visit
 - b. Only when I think I need to be advised
 - c. Every semester
 - d. More than once per semester
13. How often do you check your FIU email?
- a. At least once a day
 - b. At least once a week
 - c. At least once a month
 - d. When I remember to check
 - e. Almost never
 - f. Didn't even know I have FIU email
14. How often do you check the FIU website for updates?
- a. At least once a day
 - b. At least once a week
 - c. At least once a month
 - d. When I remember to check
 - e. Almost never