Transforming Peer Advisor Training: Designing A Virtual Curriculum That Will Outlast COVID-19

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NACADA Fall 2021

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
Agenda:

- Our Advising Model and the Transition to “Flipped” Training
- Using “Flipped Training” to Teach and Apply Skills and Professional Competencies
- Technology Lessons
- Virtual Team Building
Our Advising Model and the Transition to “Flipped” Training
Institutional Profile: Agnes Scott College

Private, liberal arts college for women in Metro Atlanta

**Enrollment:** 974 degree-seeking undergraduates, highly diverse (31% white, 41% Pell Eligible); 82% of students live on campus

**Mission:** Agnes Scott College educates women to think deeply, live honorably, and engage the intellectual and social challenges of their times.
Integrative Learning Through Advising

- Team-based advising model: Board of Advisors
- Personally meaningful program of study for each student
- Academic plans integrate their major, their gen-ed coursework, co-curricular experiences, and high-impact practices like internships and research
- Students are active participants in the advising relationship; they use advising time to reflect and deepen their learning
- This is a transformational relationship, rather than merely a transactional one

("Toward a Theory of Advising," Lowenstein 2014)
SUMMIT Advising: The Board of Advisors

SUMMIT Advisor

Peer Advising

Major Advisor

Career Advising

First Year Student  Sophomore Year  Junior Year  Senior Year  Graduation Post-ASC
SUMMIT Peer Advisors: Overview

SUMMIT Peer Advisors are trained upper-class students who work with you in the summer before you arrive at Agnes Scott and the fall semester of your first year to ensure you have a smooth transition to college life. Your Peer Advisor is on hand to answer questions, listen to your concerns, clarify college policies, and introduce you to new opportunities and resources across the campus.

- Sophomores, juniors and seniors
- Intentionally chosen to represent the diversity of our campus
- Paid, non-work study opportunity
- Spring and Fall required training sessions
- Facilitate sessions of FYE course, individual advising meetings, and other group programs
SUMMIT Peer Advisors: Timeline

**Jan-Mar**: Recruitment, Applications, Selection

**Apr**: Spring Training

**May-Jul**: Summer Emails and Social Media

**Aug**: Fall Training - FYE Course & Individual Meetings

**Sept-Oct**: Fall Training

**Nov-Dec**: Other programming
Training Before COVID

Spring:

4 90-minute sessions, weekly in April

- Team building
- FERPA & Privacy
- Advising Scenarios
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Summer expectations

Fall:

3 7-hour days leading up to Orientation

- Hiring and employment procedures
- Campus resources (including guest speakers from multiple campus offices)
- Study skills and academic success
- Individual meeting preparation
- Fall Programming
- Leadership development
- Curriculum basics
COVID-19 Response

- College closed March 2020, just a few weeks before spring training was supposed to begin
- Decided over the summer to remain closed for the fall semester
- Only a partial re-opening Spring 2021, with limited students on campus and no large gatherings
- Full re-opening in Fall 2021 (vaccines and masks required!)
Spring 2020

- First attempt at blended synchronous/asynchronous content
- Most modules were very simple PowerPoints with narration, followed by discussion board posts
- Pushback from students that asynchronous modules felt like too much “work” at a time when school (and the world!) was stressful and living situations were in flux; they preferred discussions to be “live” rather than needing to put their thoughts in writing
“Flipped” Models In Scholarship

**Steele’s Flipped Advising Approach:** creating virtual modules and activities to add an asynchronous layer to inform conversations during synchronous advising sessions (Steele 2016)

**Brame’s Flipped Classroom:**
- Provide an opportunity for students to gain first exposure prior to class
- Provide an incentive for students to prepare for class
- Provide a mechanism to assess student understanding
- Provide in-class activities that focus on higher level cognitive activities

(Brame 2013)
First Exposure to Informational Content

1. Students can choose when and for how long to engage with the material via videos, powerpoint presentations, etc.

Assessment of Learning in Process

2. Whether this is a quiz, a discussion board post, or some other check-in, this mechanism provides the incentive to devote appropriate time to preparation and a way for the facilitator to check comprehension.

Reflection, Collaboration, & Application

3. Using time together judiciously to focus on active peer-to-peer learning that deepens students understanding of the material.

Asynchronous

Synchronous
Guiding Questions for Training Design

Which elements of training are strictly “informational” and which ones require peer-to-peer interaction to deepen the reflection on, understanding of, and application of the concepts?

Which exercises and activities are valuable enough as learning activities to require participants to use Zoom time on?

What is the maximum amount of time on Zoom that will hold the attention of our participants? What is the maximum amount of work outside of “live” sessions that will not feel unmanageable to our participants?
Creative Teaching Opportunities

- What technology platforms are you comfortable with and how can you get more comfortable with a few of them? How does using technology and the format of asynchronous content allow you to deliver lessons in innovative ways?

- How does focusing on interactive in-person time create opportunities for new ways to help students apply what they’re learning? How can you structure the time to create good discussions, even if students are slow to jump in?
Logistical Considerations

- How much time will it take you to prep the asynchronous content? Make sure you begin planning FAR in advance because this always takes longer than you think. Use the “slow” seasons of the year to prepare and build content.

- Develop explicit schedules and plans for students, like a course syllabus, to help them understand how to navigate the asynchronous and synchronous sessions. Use the same schedule yourself to stay organized with when to make modules visible in your LMS or when to send a reminder about an upcoming due date.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date!</th>
<th>What's happening?</th>
<th>What's due?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday, August 1</td>
<td>Training goes live in Canvas!</td>
<td>Complete “Getting Paid” module before anything else.</td>
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<td>Sunday, August 2</td>
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<td>Monday, August 3</td>
<td>SPA Email #3: Remote Learning sent out.</td>
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<td>Monday, August 10</td>
<td>SPA Email #4: How to Acquire Textbooks sent out.</td>
<td>Campus Resources: Sign up for a resource for Campus Resource Presentation by 11:59PM</td>
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<td>Tuesday, August 11</td>
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<td>Complete Welcome module by 11:59PM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 12</td>
<td>SPA Training Meeting #1: 11-12:30PM EDT SPA/SA Meeting: Time determined by SA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, August 13</td>
<td>SPA Training Meeting #2: 11-12:30PM EDT Brainstorm Virtual Lunch Tables topics by 11:59PM Complete “Make It Stick” module</td>
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<td>Friday, August 14</td>
<td>SPA Training Meeting #3: 11-12:30PM EDT</td>
<td>Post Campus Resource Presentation</td>
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<td>Saturday, August 15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday, August 16</td>
<td>Complete all training modules!</td>
<td>Watch all Campus Resource presentations and comment/respond to comments on at least 2 Add topics to your virtual lunch table dates Complete Accessible Education Module Complete Sexual Harassment/Title IX Module Complete Understanding the Leadership Practicum Module</td>
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How did it go?

Unlike in the Spring, when students pushed back on asynchronous modules, by Fall 2020 when we had a more intentional integration between the asynchronous modules and the synchronous calls, students repeatedly gave us positive feedback.

- They appreciated the intentionality about not wasting in-person time and the flexibility about when they could complete the Canvas modules.
- The group discussions on Zoom were rich and engaged, even with all of the limitations of that platform for engaging large groups in conversation.
- Even the student participation in the Canvas course quizzes and discussion boards was thoughtful, reflective, and substantive!
Case Study: Using the Flipped Model to Teach Inclusive Communication
Empower our Peer Advisors to:

● Connect with their students **authentically** and **effectively** over email, social media, text messages, or in-person
● Stay “on-message” with the communications they send to first year students, no matter what topic they are writing about
● Recognize the ways that **diverse backgrounds** impact the experiences students have during their first year
● Choose **inclusive language** in summer emails that celebrates and welcomes students from a multiplicity of backgrounds
Inclusive Communication and Advising Basics

Complete 3 modules on Canvas prior to our Zoom call:

- FERPA & Confidentiality Quiz (10-15 minutes)
- Communication and Advising Basics (30 minutes)
- Diversity of First Year Experiences (1 hour)

Participate in a 90 minute Zoom call to debrief and expand on online modules.
Diversity of First Year Experiences Module

- Panel of older Agnes Scott students reflecting on their first year
- Intentionally pulling from the categories of students least likely to engage with campus resources and support in their first semester
- Recorded in Zoom, shared via Google Slides & Canvas
Responding to Questions Like

What was your first year at Agnes Scott like? What was the best part?

What challenges or barriers did you face in your transition to college?

What campus resources did you find most helpful during your first year?

What kind of academic support do you wish had been available to you?

What can you imagine now might have been helpful in your first year of college/what do you wish you had done differently in your first year?
Communication & Advising Basics Module

- Video of combined lecture and slideshow
- Interspersed with quiz questions to check comprehension and reflection
### NACE Competencies Relevant to SPA Role

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<tr>
<th>01</th>
<th>Written and Oral Communication Competence</th>
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<td>● Create content (for websites, newsletters, media)</td>
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<td>● Communicate professionally (phone, emails, etc.)</td>
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<td>● Construct and deliver persuasive communication</td>
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<th>Leadership Competence</th>
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<td>● Use interpersonal skills &amp; empathy to guide and motivate others</td>
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<td>● Serve as a role model to others by approaching tasks with confidence and a positive attitude</td>
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<td>● Seek out and leverage diverse resources</td>
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<th>Critical Thinking &amp; Problem Solving Competence</th>
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<td>● Define &amp; think critically about the problem</td>
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<td>● Identify creative and original solutions</td>
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<td>● Accurately summarize and interpret data with an awareness of personal biases</td>
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Peer Advising Goals

- We want our new students to believe they belong in our community.
- We want our students to believe they are capable of meeting their academic goals and have help when they need it.
- We want our students to believe in the power and importance of a liberal arts education.
Synchronous Exercises

Advising scenarios
“A student responds to your Welcome email to share their anxiety and nervousness about the fall semester. They also are planning to be a commuter this fall. They describe themselves as shy and introverted and express concerns about fitting in or making friends. How would you respond to this?”

Peer Review
Reviewing email drafts in small group breakout rooms against a rubric that emphasizes inclusive language, engaging tone, clarity of information shared

Discussion
In what ways can you, in your role as a Peer Advisor, help each your new students feel like they belong on campus?
General Technology Guidelines
Approaching Virtual Training

In the flipped model, developing the content for training went hand in hand with the question of “how do we do this?”

Questions we asked ourselves:

● What technology do we have access to?
● In what ways can these technologies help us achieve our intended goals within training?
● What are our gaps in know-how and access?
● What is our and our students bandwidth for learning new technologies?
Maximize Features on Institutional Platforms

Learning Management Software

- Creating informative and visually appealing landing pages
- Quizzes to walk students through information - incorporating videos and questions for comprehension checks and reflection
- Syncing with other software (Google Slides, external platforms)
- Using deadlines to keep participants on track

Video Conferencing Platform

- Breakout rooms
- Reactions/Hand raising
- Using the chat to have participants elaborate on previous conversations simultaneously
- Recording
  - Participants who are unable to attend due to time zone issues
  - Creating videos

Google Suites or Similar

- Slides - can be synced with LMS and used in Zoom (both in screen share and more creatively)
- Sharing resources
  - I.e. Folder of sample emails from previous peer advisors to use in “Drafting an Email” activity
Choosing External Platforms: Litmus Test

- What does it add that we couldn’t do before?

- What level of learning curve does it add, for us and for the training participant?
A Screenshot from Padlet
What does it add that we couldn’t do before?

Visually appealing option for discussion boards and brainstorming/engagement activities in synchronous sessions.

What level of learning curve does it add, for us and for the training participant?

Participants click a link to access (or syncs with Canvas), intuitive user interface
What does it add that we couldn’t do before?

Informal conversation space for the team

What level of learning curve does it add, for us and for the training participant?

Students were already using GroupMe for other purposes, so no learning curve for our users.
Building Community Virtually
Defining “Community” and “Team”

For us:
- Accountable to one another
- Provide support to one another
- Kind to one another
- Learn from one another
Benefits of Pre-training

Asynchronous Introductions

- Peer advisors begin getting to know each other before first synchronous session.
- Saves synchronous time for “reflection, collaboration, application” per flipped model
- Incorporated pictures/photo sharing to help visualize each other existing in the world!
Community building during Spring & Fall training

**Icebreakers**
- How much time did we want to devote? Quick and engaging is usually best
- Is the sharing relevant to the training topic?

**Small Groups**
- Breakout rooms
- Asynchronous projects
Community Building
Outside of Training

**GroupMe**
- Weekly conversation starters in the summer
- Informal and off-topic conversations welcome

**Staff Meetings**
- Combat isolation of working individually or in small groups
- Space to reflect/share ideas
Building a Virtual Community

Intentionality

Consistency
Moving Forward

We plan to continue a “flipped” model going forward with asynchronous components that prepare students for what we hope will be in-person classroom time!

- Opportunity to use time together on more meaningful interactions
- Less need for “early arrivals” to campus and flexibility around fall training
- Ongoing COVID considerations and overall more “hybrid” college environment than pre-pandemic
- Asynchronous content is reusable!
- Builds digital proficiencies for students
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