Hello everyone, welcome to our session. We are just a group of people from the University of Arkansas who in one way or another work with academic advising, and we have a collective experience we thought was worth sharing. We worked together over the past two years to adjust our campus-wide new student orientation approach from a fully in-person, overnight experience to a fully remote experience and then, the following year, to a mixed approach. We hope our story might provide some takeaways for you in your role.
First, a bit about our campus. The university of Arkansas is a public, land-grant university. It is a state flagship. We just 29,000 students this fall. The university is organized into six academic colleges. In terms of academic advising, each college is solely in charge of advising administration within their college. There is no university college or any form of centralized, campus-wide advising. Each college uses a different approach. Some colleges have self-contained, four-year advising centers staffed with primary-role advisors while faculty-advising is more prevalent in other colleges.
Our large group of collaborators on this presentation represent most of these academic colleges. My name is Shane Barker and my co-presenter for this recorded version of the presentation is Meagon Clarkson-Guyll. We both work in the arts and sciences college, which is the largest in terms of number of students and the most diverse in terms of academic programs. We both help lead a large staff of primary-role advisors. Lucas Simmons is the advising coordinator in a smaller college, the college of agriculture and life sciences, which uses a blend of primary-role and faculty advisors.
Adrienne Gaines, from the engineering college, helps direct a comprehensive program for new engineering students that integrates advising, mentoring, and coursework. Autumn Parker works in the business college. Recruiting is a significant part of her job, as is orientation and enrollment management. Finally, Elizabeth McKinley in charge of a four-year advising center in college of education and health professions.
Our day-to-day responsibilities are very different. The one thing we have in common, however, is that each of us is the orientation lead for our respective colleges. We are each responsible for the academic portion of new student orientation. We coordinate with a central office for new student orientation which, on our campus, is housed with our enrollment services division. It is certainly worth highlighting that all of these individuals report to different administrators. The academic leads report to the dean of their college and the orientation office reports to the dean of admissions. A primary reason we wanted to share our experience was to highlight the ways in which we voluntarily decided to coordinate and compromise with each other despite our very different roles, responsibilities, and supervisors.
So. A long long time ago in a far away land, it was 2019. The grass was green, the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and this was our orientation schedule. An on-campus, two-day experience was required for most students. They arrived in the afternoon and immediately began engaging in a myriad of programs. The next day, they woke up to some more programming, this time a little more academic in topic. And then around 10am they spread across campus to the academic colleges that housed their majors. The rest of that day was spent within the college learning about majors, degree requirements, and finally, the grand prize, class registration.
There were also several condensed one-day sessions. Each of those followed the same general schedule but over the course of a single day. The bulk of sessions were in June with some in May and August as well. There were approximately 4700 new freshmen that went through an orientation session in 2019. The office of orientation handled all of those front-end logistics and programming. Getting students signed up, planning presentations and activities, moving students across campus, feeding and housing them, etc. The students were then handed off to their academic colleges, as I mentioned. Back then, each academic college had full authority to handle their part of orientation however they saw fit, as long students were advised and registered by the end of the day.
As we all know, the effects of the pandemic grew exponentially shortly after 2020 began. On this campus, in January and February of 2020, we were beginning plan out the final details of what we thought would be a typical 2020 new student orientation season. Students had begun to register for specific orientation dates back in September of 2019. But on March 16 of 2020 our campus was closed because of COVID 19 and all instruction and services moved to remote delivery. Like all of you, we scrambled to adjust every aspect of our operations. It soon became clear that we would be converting our new student orientation to a fully remote student experience. So on March 31 of 2020 the academic leads from each college and the orientation office decided to start meeting often to make new plans. We continued to meet, brainstorm, and make decisions throughout April and May. We had more meetings – so many meetings. And then, ready or not, our first remote orientation session in the history of this campus occurred on May 26 of 2020.
During the 2020 New Student Orientation planning all of the colleges needed to understand the advising processes of one another so that we could articulate an accurate common advising experience to our new students.

We learned through this information exchange that it was also important for us to ask for similar information from our new students in familiar ways so that they could have a common experience and so that the orientation office could help students prepare for what to expect in advising.

As you will see, we learned a lot through our planning efforts as well as during real time reactions. One of the first major lessons we uncovered was the importance of understanding what information systems and communication systems each office used for their daily jobs.

Technology became one of the first issues we collaborated on as we prepared for the transition to virtual advising.
When we made the transition to a virtual orientation, it was decided that the university-level orientation programming would use an external software company to build the modules and then the colleges would add their own advising content on their websites with links embedded. This was our traditional approach; let the colleges do advising how it best fits them.

We mutually decided that Microsoft Teams would be the advising platform due to a pending institutional Zoom license issue. At first, we believed that this common decision might be all we needed, but we quickly learned that there was a clear need for our advising practices & messages to be more aligned as we built communication content for students.

We learned that we were tackling similar concerns across the colleges such as:
- What should we do if students do not have internet access?
- What information do we need prior to their appointment & how do we get that information?
- How and when do we facilitate program changes that involves students changing colleges without confusing the student?
These conversations became instinctual for us as we realized we were looking to one another for advice. Through our conversations we developed pre-advising forms that mimicked one another but left the individual college culture shine through. We kept similar website structures and information, but tailored them to our own cultures. We shared common How-To videos and appointment descriptions for our online scheduling system.

Through this process we became more collaborative partners at the inter-college level and learned a lot from each other about the reasons why we may approach certain activities like pre-enrollment, major declaration, and tracking in different ways depending on our resources & retention practices.
As mentioned a few moments ago, the move to virtual orientation required more digital content and communication from the college advising centers than ever before.

College leads agreed that we needed to move more content online and post it earlier so that students would be more academically prepared for a virtual advising appointment. This was because all colleges would do scheduled 30 minute appointments and we all knew from experience that students needed the content they would have normally received over 1-2 days somehow before they logged into advising.

To help our students navigate our college information, we all developed landing pages for new student orientation within our advising sites and followed a similar format with familiar content, though each reflected the advising culture & conversations specific to that college. These pages were also linked through the main orientation site.

Through this exercise in 2020, we saw the need emerge for pre-advising forms that let students know what kind of information we would need to complete a successful
advising appointment. Colleges used the platforms with which they were most familiar, typically Microsoft Forms & Qualtrics, & circulated them with advisors prior to the appointments. We shared drafts of our forms with each other and soon our forms began to take a recognizable shape & flow across colleges.
This is an example of how advising was linked and embedded through our New Student Orientation office.
This is an example of 1 college’s landing page for new students and the type of expandable content for students to use. Having stable access to these common enrollment questions proved to be very beneficial for our new students after orientation even though we designed it with pre-advising information in mind.
Our advising appointments in the virtual orientation model mimicked traditional student appointments in that they were prescheduled for 30 minutes. This time, though, they were video appointments in Microsoft Teams which added a new layer of communication and technology skills in 2020.

What became apparent was the need for agreed upon processes for getting students connected with their advisor. Our institution does not have a deadline for major changes with summer orientation, so it is common for students to register for 1 college’s advising and then change majors to another college. Often, that communication originated with New Student Orientation staff, so it became a highly collaborative process that had the potential to get messy quickly.

We learned as we were launching the season that we needed to have an organized way to update student majors within our own colleges and to communicate to their new college & NSO that they needed a new advising appointment.

In 2020, this was a harried practice that included a lot of Microsoft teams chats, tags, & posts. By 2021 we refined the process to use a notification system in our Starfish services.
We want to close this presentation with just a few of the lessons we learned throughout this experience in hopes we can all build from here. First, from the student perspective, there were several potential benefits to this new format. The biggest thing is that students were guaranteed scheduled, one-on-one advising interactions. Previously, this was not always possible due to limited time and resources. In this new format, it was really our only choice. Students also enjoyed access to a ton of “on-demand” content whereas in the past, they would have been feverishly attending (or, more likely, feverishly ignoring) a selection of one-time presentations on campus. The tradeoff, however, was that while they were guaranteed some face time with an advisor, they did not interact one-on-one with anyone else. For the parents, it did given them much more involvement in the academic side of orientation which as a change from previous years. This, perhaps unsurprisingly, seemed to greatly increase parent satisfaction while also greatly increase parental disruptions within advising appointments. For advisors, as you might imagine, this was a radical shift. The structure gave advisors much more preparation and pre-enrollment time, which was appreciated. With plenty of work, we were able to forecast enrollment needs and barriers more than in the past. But with the addition of scheduled advising appointments, a tremendous amount of work was shifted to the advising units. A large amount of time was now spent scheduling

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**LESSONS LEARNED FROM 2020**

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| **Students** | • 1:1 advising conversations  
• Clarity on ‘Who’ is my advisor  
• Stable access to orientation content | • Less flexibility on appt time  
• In person connections reduced |
| **Parents**  | • High reduction of parent complaints to administration  
• Increased transparency in advising | • More direct involvement in advising conversation  
• Less parent-specific orientation content |
| **Advisors** | • Longer preparation time for advising appts  
• Able to forecast enrollment issues ahead of time | • Increased behind-the-scenes work to schedule & track students  
• Advising content exceeded 30 minutes |
and rescheduling students, tracking down missed appointments, sharing info about students with other campus stakeholders, etc. Additionally, this approach asked far too much from a half hour advising appointment. In the past, students spent more than 3 hours with their colleges. They were able to learn about our information system, discover majors, and tackle registration barriers through a variety of activities and presentations in each college. All of that was not packed into a 30 minute session with one advisor, which often proved impossible. These are out takeaways in the broadest sense. Of course, if we had more time, each of us would have our own unique lessons learned. Given that we all have different roles and responsibilities, we all certainly had our own experiences.
If you want to chat more about those experiences, or have any questions at all, please contact one of us. We would be happy to talk more. Thanks for engaging in this presentation and enjoy the conference.