Virtual Academic Advising in Challenging Times

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Abstract
With the rapid shift to remote learning because of the pandemic, the academic advisors of colleges and universities had to adapt and change some of the ways they were advising the traditional higher education students. In this new normal, where social distance needs to be present and non-traditional education takes precedence in the learning environment, academic advisors had to rapidly adjust and use different technology tools of virtual advising. Over the past few years, colleges and universities that offer distance education programs have been struggling in engaging and retaining their non-traditional online learners. However, with the pandemic, these institutions may encounter the challenge of not only retaining the non-traditional students but also, the new distance learners. Therefore, academic advisors will need to use creative ways of providing advising services in this new learning environment. Many studies have demonstrated that virtual advising has been helpful to aid the distance education students. Virtual advising uses different technology applications and platforms. Using it correctly can help students and advisors with the registration cycles and with any other concerns the students may have. In this chapter, the author explains academic advising and the role of an advisor, the definition of virtual advising, the importance of combining the different approaches of academic advising into virtual advising, and the different technology tools that can assist academic advisors when doing their job of supporting the students in the new learning environment.

Keywords: academic advising, virtual advising, online learner, pandemic, technology tools.
1. Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has hit higher education institutions and their stakeholders globally. In the Spring 2020 term, many colleges, and universities across the United States (U.S.) closed their doors, while others had to move their face-to-face classes to online instruction, in a matter of weeks. In addition to moving the classes to an online format, the pandemic has caused other campus operations to transition remotely. One of them has been the academic advising services. While this has been a time of uncertainty, challenges, and anxiety, the role of the academic advisor has been a vital one in the student’s life. In this challenging time, more than ever, advisors need to be supportive of the students.

The number of students enrolled in online courses, in the U.S., increased for the fourteenth consecutive year since 2004 (Seaman et al., 2018). Even though enrollment in distance education courses had increased before the pandemic, the institutions of higher education have been struggling in retaining and providing appropriate student services to keep up with the students’ needs. Academic advising is very important to the students’ success at any degree level in the college or university. The key to effective academic advising is to detect the problems early on and direct the student to the correct resource. The advisor is the key person to help students succeed in their program of study. There is not one single formula for providing advising. Each student has a different story and as an advisor, you need to be prepared and find adequate resources for each situation.

Experts recommend that students meet with their advisors regularly, to ensure they remain on the correct path for degree completion and graduation (Moody, 2019). Some colleges require students to schedule appointments with their advisors, while others encourage walk-ins. Now, more than ever, academic advising plays an essential role in institutions of higher education.

With the rapid transition to a remote format, due to the pandemic, it is vital to apply virtual advising principles so that students continue receiving academic advising services. In the past, virtual advising was mostly used for non-traditional students. However, the new normal is non-traditional education in the learning environment.

Before the pandemic hit, many academic advisors were already implementing virtual advising strategies in their day-to-day operations, while others had to adapt in a matter of days to the new normal. Many of the advisors were asked to work remotely, while others remained working on campus without seeing students physically, only remotely. As a result, a question to consider is how should academic advising be reconsidered to best deliver some of the new realities that lie ahead?

This chapter focuses on understanding the importance of offering virtual advising services to support the new reality many students, with diverse needs and challenges, and higher education institutions are facing because of COVID19. To understand the importance of virtual advising, the definition of academic advising will be explained first. Then, the role of the advisor along with the most common approaches of academic advising will be described. Third, the concept of virtual advising, its best practices, the virtual advising process, and the technology tools used in virtual advising will be portrayed. Lastly, a discussion of switching to an online advising model during challenging or uncertain times will be presented.

2. Virtual Academic Advising in a Pandemic or in Uncertain Times
2.1 Definition of Academic Advising
Advising is a multidimensional profession with an array of perspectives, philosophies, and needs (Ryan, 2010). Academic advising can be defined as the interaction that occurs between the undergraduate or graduate students and their assigned academic advisor. In this process, the students will explore with their advisor the university’s services, resources, policies and procedures, and their academic, professional, and personal goals (The University of Maine at Machias, 1986).
The process of academic advising depends on a shared understanding among the academic advisor, the student, and the university (the University of Nebraska Omaha, n.d.). Academic advising occurs when a representative from the institution guides a college student about an academic or professional matter. The nature of this guidance may be to advise, coach, mentor, recommend, or even to teach (Kuhn, 2008).

Academic advising requirements differ across colleges and universities in the U.S. (Moody, 2019). However, the academic advising profession follows certain principles and values across the globe. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) Statement of Core Values suggests the various educational and cultural situations in which academic advising is performed worldwide. The Core Values guide academic advisors. According to NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising (2017), the seven Core Values that NACADA supports are the following:

1. **Caring**: Advisors are available to others and respond to in methods that question, help, teach, and nurture. Advisors build up relationships through empathetic listening and kindness to advisees, colleagues, and others.
2. **Commitment**: Academic advisors value excellence in all areas of student success. Advisors are committed to their profession through assessment, life-long learning, and professional development.
3. **Empowerment**: Advisors should motivate, encourage, and support students to acknowledge their potential and meet challenges.
4. **Inclusivity**: Advisors respect, engage, and value diverse populations. The advisors support the students and colleagues through openness, equity, and acceptance.
5. **Integrity**: Academic advisors act following professional and ethical actions acquired through reflective practice.
6. **Professionalism**: Advisors act under the value of the advising profession.
7. **Respect**: Academic advisors sustain a student-centered approach and treating students with sensitivity and fairness.

### 2.2 The Role of an Academic Advisor

The role of the advisor has evolved during recent years. The role of the academic advisor goes beyond assisting the students in signing up for classes and ensuring they are on the correct path of their degree program. The academic advisor has become a focal point for the institution’s resources (Moody, 2019). The advisor assists and guides the advisees in selecting a major, making appropriate course selections, and helping with course registration. To accomplish this process, the academic advisor should meet regularly with the student. An effective academic advisor assists students in successful decision-making strategies, contributing to their maturity and self-directedness (The University of Maine at Machias, 1986).

Academic advisors offer guidance to students so that they are successful in their professional and academic careers. Advisors seek to build an understanding and trusting relationship with the advisees. The advisor should be there for the student not only on difficult times but also to explore options and opportunities that can assist them to achieve their academic and personal goals. For example, an advisee may express interest in an internship, a campus job, a study-abroad program, involvement in a sorority or club, research, or select their major.

In addition to helping students succeed in academic matters, the advisor can also support students troubleshoot personal matters hindering with their studies (Moody, 2019). Therefore, as advisors, it is important to find discussion topics to meet the needs of the students and help them be successful in their program of study (Smothers, 2020).

Advisors aid students develop appropriate plans of study based on their academic goals. They also refer students to other offices for assistance in tutoring, academic and writing skills, career counseling, mental health, and financial aid. To foster the advisor-advisee relationship,
it is recommended that both parties establish and follow a list of responsibilities. A list of the respective responsibilities can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Advisor and Advisee Recommended Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor responsibilities</th>
<th>Advisee responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be knowledgeable about the different majors and academic programs, policies and procedures, and resources of the corresponding college</td>
<td>Follow and abide by the institution’s policies and procedures, and use the resources responsibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be available to meet with the students and guide them accordingly</td>
<td>Attend and keep all scheduled appointments with their advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate often and clearly with the students</td>
<td>Inform their advisor of any issue they are having in their classes or personal lives that may impact their academic progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor students’ progress towards completion of their degree program and graduation by diminishing risk factors</td>
<td>Keep track of their program outline and follow their degree requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve students in their academic planning process, motivate, and assist them in an effective decision-making process</td>
<td>Understand their academic degree program and its corresponding requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer students to the various institutional departments or community resources accordingly (e.g. Financial Aid office, bursar’s office, registrar’s office, etc.)</td>
<td>Be responsible and accountable for making their own final decisions based on the best advice received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the institution retain the students by contacting proactively the students</td>
<td>Contact their academic advisor with questions about majors, minors, and the registration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay informed of institutional changes or issues that may affect the students’ success</td>
<td>Attend classes, study hard, and do regular degree audits</td>
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2.3 Approaches to academic advising
Several perspectives or styles of advising need to be considered when advising traditional or non-traditional learners. The main purpose of these approaches is to help the student be successful in their academic and professional careers and help the institutions of higher education engage and retain the students. For this chapter, the following approaches or styles of academic advising will be emphasized: (a) Developmental advising, (b) Prescriptive advising, (c) Appreciative advising, (d) Intrusive/proactive advising, and (e) Group advising.

Developmental advising:
In this style, the advisor and the student share responsibility and it is a collaborative approach. The advisor helps the advisee learn about the program of study, courses, and the institution’s policies and procedures. The advisor tells the student about the various deadlines, present class options, shows the student where to look for the course schedule, the academic resources, workshops, and how to keep track of their academic progress. In this style of advising, the advisor assists the advisee in identifying and setting realistic goals academic goals based on grades, test results, and self-interests (Missouri State University, 2020).

Prescriptive advising: In this approach, the advisor tells the student what to do, and places most of the responsibility on the advisor. The students do what they are told to do. The advisor is considered the “expert”, and the student needs to follow the advisor’s directions. It uses linear communication from the advisor to the advisee. In this style, the advisor “tells” the learner what to do rather than “inform” the student of the alternatives (Missouri State University, 2020).
Appreciative advising: This style of advising allows the advisor to use the problem-solving model. Truschel (2008) recommends that the advisor positively approaches the student and use supportive language. Appreciative advising is positive and action-oriented (Truschel, 2018). Appreciative advising highlights the student’s ability to reflect upon and considers the student’s strengths and assets (Bloom et al., 2014). This style of advising is based on Cooperrider and Srivastva’s 4D appreciative inquiry model. The 4D appreciative inquiry model has four phases: discovery, dream, design, and deliver (Cooney et al., 2016). According to Bloom et al. (2014), in this style of advising, advisors engage advisees in investigating resources on the institution, create academic plans and schedules, and obtain other pathways to accomplish academic success.

Intrusive or proactive advising: The focus of this approach of advising is to provide students with the resources before they ask for them (Varney, 2012). In this style of advising, the academic advisors connect proactively with the students before an unfixable problem or situation occurs. Waterhouse (2016) indicates that intrusive advising is primarily effective for at-risk students and first-year students; nonetheless, it can be used for all types of learners. Proactive advising boosts student motivation and uses certain strategies to demonstrate interest and involvement with the advisee (Waterhouse, 2016). Furthermore, intrusive advising tries to increase the likelihood of student success and educates students of all options (Varney, 2012).

Group advising: Many higher education institutions in the U.S. are facing economic challenges and do not have enough academic advisors to meet the students’ needs. As a result, one advising approach used for dealing with these challenges is group advising (Ryan, 2010). Group advising provides the students the opportunity to interact with other learners who may have different viewpoints listen to their questions and enhance peer involvement. The group advising model can help the advisee not to feel alone (Ryan, 2010). Group advising is a shared responsibility between the advisor and the advisee, like in development advising. It is an efficient way of sharing information with the students (Stockwell, 2013). There are different methods for delivering group advising such as new student orientations, first-year seminar courses, study skills and career planning webinars, and seminars for special populations (minority students, international students, honor students, at-risk students, and non-traditional learners).

2.4 The concept of virtual academic advising
Enrollment in online courses and programs in U.S. colleges and universities increased by 5.6%, from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, where the number of students taking at least one online course reached 6,359,121, representing 31.6% of all students (Seaman et al, 2018).

Despite the increasing percentages in enrollment, distance education courses continue to show declining retention rates. Research indicates that online courses present social, motivational, and technological issues from the faculty’s and the student’s perspectives (Bawa, 2016). Hence, there are different mechanisms many U.S. colleges and universities are implementing to help retain the online learners. For instance, one of them is offering online academic advising services.

Virtual advising consists of adapting regular academic advising components to an online environment, always taking into consideration the diverse needs and challenges the distance learner faces. In online advising, the advisors and the advisees engage in an advising session, not in person (Brown, 2017). Virtual advising seeks to connect and engage the online learner with the institution, in a virtual environment. These learners have characteristics that are unique to them and is a heterogeneous group. Students that select online courses can be working professionals with full-time jobs or traditional learners that reside on campus but want to take an online course because of its flexibility. Besides, many institutions have embedded an online component into their traditional classes to create a blended experience.
Virtual advising should also follow NACADA’s Core Values previously mentioned.

The role of the virtual advisor is to provide students with the most accurate and current information about their program of study and classes, and the institution’s policies and procedures. As a face-to-face advisor, the virtual advisor will help the students with their academic career and professional goals. The online advisor should be considered the liaison between the student and the institution. The advisor will help the learner keep moving easily through their online courses. The responsibilities of an online advisor and advisee should be the same as the ones mentioned in Table 1. The virtual advisor needs to engage the online learner in a meaningful and productive advising session and establish an advising relationship in an online environment.

Virtual advising is supported by advanced technologies that allow the students to seek the guidance they need anytime and anywhere. Online advising systems can provide higher education institutions considerable benefits and can help them with increasing retention and improving completion rates (Innovative Educators, 2020). However, readiness for these systems makes it clear that colleges and universities need more assistance in understanding how to effectively develop and implement a virtual advising model. Institutions need to assist their advisors by providing them with the appropriate technological tools and training they might need to perform their job.

Some of the challenges of virtual advising include Issues of connectivity, confidentiality, and security in online advising. Advisors need to abide by institutional and federal regulations that protect the student’s privacy and confidentiality. The online advisor should always verify the student’s identity and follow the policies and procedures to protect the student’s identity.

2.4.1 The virtual advising process

The academic advising processes at a distance may follow different processes depending on each institution. The following process combines the academic advising approaches, previously explained, with other elements that may assist in this process. Figure 1 shows a summary of the recommended virtual advising process.

1. Once the student has been admitted to the college or university, the student should be assigned to an academic advisor based on their declared major(s) and/or degree level (i.e. undergraduate or graduate). This should be considered the planning phase.

2. Advisors should welcome the student, via email and text message, and tell the student to schedule the first virtual advising meeting. The advisor should provide the students with the necessary tutorials to join the meeting. In this introductory meeting, the advisor should incorporate the appreciative advising approach by asking the students to reveal what is important to them and what achievements give them pride. Additionally, the advisor should assist the students in selecting their first term courses and should register them for the classes. Additionally, in this first meeting, the academic advisor should establish a “professional relationship” with the advisee. This is the time to get to know the students and for them to get to know the advisor. This one should be as thorough as possible and should share with the student helpful documents and resources. Further, the advisor should integrate the prescriptive advising style to tell the advisee what to do and where to look for the most important information. In this meeting, the advisor should be using one of the institution’s videoconference platform (e.g. Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Go to Meeting, Skype, etc.). The recommended time for the first virtual meeting should be between 45 to 60 minutes.

3. One week before classes start, the new students should attend a mandatory online orientation facilitated by the academic advisor(s) and the department chair. The group advising style may be followed for this orientation. The new student orientation should engage the online students and permit them to network and ask questions. The orientation should be interactive with simulations, games, and multimedia. Further, it should provide the learners with tips to be successful in distance education courses. The orientation
should last 90 minutes, and the recording should remain available for the student for at least two terms.

4. A few weeks after the semester has started, the advisors should send an email to the students to remark on the advisee/advisor’s expectations and responsibilities in the advising process. Also, the advisor should check on the welfare of the student.

5. The advisor should continue communicating with the students, via text message, email, or phone calls, during the first term and in subsequent terms, to make sure they are doing well, both personally and academically, and to try to detect any challenge the student is facing before it becomes more severe. The intrusive or proactive advising model should be followed.

6. The advisor should also be available to students in case they have questions, concerns, or having issues with their classes.

7. Every term, when the registration period begins, the advisor should send the students weekly reminders via text message and email and offer their assistance. Advisors should host “pop-in” virtual office hours where students can join a videoconference or chat with the advisor and ask questions that do not require much time.

8. The virtual advising process should continue until the students complete their degree program and graduate.

Figure 1
The Virtual Advising Process

2.4.2 Technology tools to support the virtual advising model
This section will provide different technology tools that can be used to adapt a virtual advising model, to provide effective online student services.

Email: This is the most common method of communicating with the students. There are different reasons to send an email to students. As discussed in the online advising process section, an academic advisor should email the advisee an introductory note and the invitation to the online orientation. Also, the advisor should send follow up emails to check on the students’ welfare and academic progress, to notify them of any concern regarding grades or class attendance, and to provide kudos if they are doing well in the courses. It is recommended that advisors answer any email inquiry from a student within 24 to 48 business hours. Email etiquette should always be followed.

Text messages: Texting has become a fundamental role in our day-to-day communications with friends, family, and co-workers. Texting allows academic advisors to communicate instantly with the advisee. Pawelek and Cantu (2014) indicate that texting has shown to be an effective tool in building reliability, trust, and confidence in the advisor-advisee relationship. Advisors do not need to use their cell phones to send out text messages. These
The impact of COVID-19 on the International Education System can be sent out from the advisors’ email address. Additionally, the advisor may use Desktop messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram to send group or individual messages.

**Phone calls:** Advisors should be available on the phone to answer questions the students may have. Phone appointments are very common in academic advising. It is recommended to have call-in hours where students can connect with an advisor without an appointment. If the advisor is working remotely, the office phone number may be forwarded to the advisor’s phone or the advisor may use Google Voice. Advisors should follow the same protocol as with the emails, all phone messages should be returned within 24 to 48 business hours.

**Academic Advising Appointment Scheduling Software:** Online appointment scheduling software can help the academic advisors organize better their time and provide better service to the students. There are different appointment scheduler software free and others that have a fee. Some include: Appointy, Schedulicity, Genbook, MyTime, Calendly, Setmore, Acuity Scheduling, Client Focus, and TimeTrade (Mishra, 2020).

**Video conferencing software:** The use of video conferencing can help replicate a face-to-face advisor-advisee meeting. Students can meet their academic advisor remotely and establish a relationship of trust. One of the major benefits of video conferencing is that it allows the advisor to share the screen so that both parties can view and discuss the same document at the same time. Video conferencing is also helpful for group advising sessions. The most common video conferencing software include Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Blue Jeans, Go To Meeting, Adobe Connect, and Dialpad, among others.

**Advising portal or hub:** Many colleges and universities across the U.S. have implemented advising portals to assist the students in navigating the institution’s resources more effectively. The hub can be created as a website or as a course in the Learning Management System (LMS) the institution uses. The purpose of the hub is to make it easier for the students to communicate with their academic advisors and to find helpful resources in just one place. In this portal, students can: (a) schedule appointments with their advisors, (b) sign up for webinars or other virtual events, (c) find the academic calendar, (d) review the course schedule, (e) register for classes, (f) receive notifications, (g) communicate with the advisor via the video conferencing software tool, (h) network with other students, (i) access the orientation, (j) access their academic record, among other things.

**Early alert systems:** Early alert systems (EAS) can quickly notify the academic advisors when a student is not doing well in a class, not attending a class, or any other issue. The following is the way the EAS work. First, the faculty member creates a work order indicating the issue with the student. A notification goes to the advisor’s email. Then, the advisor communicates with the student to assist. Finally, the faculty member receives a notification when the request has been completed. There are different EAS software that can be used. This is a good tool to help the students succeed. From the institution’s point of view, these systems can help retain the student.

**Social media:** A notorious dimension of technology is social media. This technology tool allows the advisors to share helpful information with the students, such as upcoming seminars, webinars, events, and registration reminders (Gaines, 2014). Further, social media allows the creation of learning communities. Social media can foster student engagement and facilitate communication. Some of the most common social media sites are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Many colleges and host live events in these sites to engage the students and the community with the institution.
**Degree audit management software:** Online degree audit systems can help students calculate their progress towards degree completion. Degree audit tools are easy-to-use planning tools that can assist the students to monitor their progress and create What-If scenarios. The evaluations generated by this tool are not official and they should not replace the academic advisor. Some examples of degree audit software include: Ellucian Degree Works, Liftoff Academics, Empower, among others.

### 2.5 Applying best practices for virtual advising

The following best practices for virtual advising should be followed, always taking into consideration that the student is at a distance and may be experiencing a difficult or challenging time.

1. The advisor should always ask the students how they are doing regardless of the virtual advising technology used.
2. The advisor should treat emails as if they were a regular advising session.
3. The advisor should be familiar with the technology platform that will be used during the student’s appointment.
4. The academic advisor should connect the student with the other academic or student services department where they need assistance, rather than just providing a phone number or link to it.
5. The advisor should make the student feel that online interactions are meaningful and effective.
6. The advisor should anticipate helpful information that the students may need.
7. The advisor should always use professional communication in all types of virtual communication.
8. The advisor should always answer emails, phone calls, and text messages as soon as they can.
9. The advisor should always document the phone conversations, emails, and other types of communication in the student’s record.
10. The advisor should send a tutorial on how to use the video conference tool or any other technology tool before connecting with the student.
11. The advisor should always remind the students of the advisors and the advisees’ responsibilities.
12. The advisor should always remind the students to include their name and their student ID in their communications.
13. When meeting virtually with the students, the advisor should consider using a combination of resources to engage the advisees and interact with them.
14. The advisor should recommend the students to turn the camera on when using a video conference application.
15. The advisor should follow up with the students so that they feel appreciated.
16. The advisor should substitute walk-ins with virtual “walk-in” office hours.
17. The advisor should put the student in charge of their success.
18. The advisor should monitor the student’s progress closely and contact the student immediately if there is a foreseeable problem.
19. The advisor should make a term-by-term academic plan with the students. This plan can be emailed to the student and included in the student’s academic advising notes.

### 2.6 Switching to online advising

Before the pandemic hit, some institutions of higher education in the U.S. were already implementing virtual advising strategies in their day-to-day operations. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, most colleges and universities had to adapt, in a short period, to the new normal. Many of the advisors were asked to work remotely, while others remained working on campus without seeing students physically, only remotely. Regardless of the
advisor’s location, switching to advising online in a matter of days is not easy, especially if the advisor has never taught or advised online. As Howard (2020) remarks, advising online can be very tricky, and having access to all the technology tools can be even more challenging. The first thing that needs to be done to assist the advisors and remote learners is to flip the way face-to-face advising services are offered. To do this rapid switch, academic advising departments need to assess the available tools, to be able to implement virtual advising strategies. For example, advisors need to be given laptops, access to the institution’s Virtual private network (VPN), the office phone number needs to be forwarded to the advisor’s cell phone or their computers, and the advisors need access to other university technology applications. For a list of things to consider when assessing the technology tools to switch to a virtual advising model, please refer to Table 2.

Some advisors may need more assistance than others when implementing and using online advising tools. Therefore, the second item that needs to be taken into consideration is to provide the advisors with continuous support and training so that they can implement the best practices of virtual advising. Supervisors should be available to troubleshoot any problem the advisors may encounter. Peer-support is also recommended.

Third, it is critical that the higher education institution updates its websites and sends special communications to the students to keep them informed of any changes. If the institution uses chatbots for admissions or advising questions, it is important to keep them updated regularly with accurate information (Howard, 2020). Academic advisors also need to keep students informed of all the changes happening at the institution and reinforce the institution’s announcements. It is also recommended that institutions use their LMS to post important announcements.

Table 2
Assessing your remote tools for advising online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you need a laptop, or do you have a computer at home that you can use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do you have your advising files on your computer, or do you need to copy them to cloud storage such as Microsoft OneDrive, Box, Dropbox, or Google Drive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Will you have access to files, advising notes, Enterprise Resource Planning Software or Student Information System, Degree Audit software, and other university resources?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you need access to the institution’s VPN?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will you have access to the online advising appointment system, reporting software, and LMS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you need to download the institution’s video conferencing software to your tablet, cell phone, or computer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you need to have your office phone number forwarded to your computer or cell phone? Do you need to create a Google Voice account?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Does your computer have a camera, or will you need an external one to use the video conferencing software?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you have a flexible schedule to accommodate the students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6.1 Helping students adjust and be successful in online learning

There may be cases where students are new to online learning. For students starting their first term in the academic institution, or new to distance education, the academic advisor needs to ask them if they assist and provide them with tools to be successful in the new virtual learning environment.

The advisor should provide the student with the necessary tutorials and study skills strategies to remain positive in the online classes. The advisor should remind students transitioning to distance education courses to (a) communicate with their faculty if they have questions about the course, (b) check regularly their institutional email, (c) log in to the LMS daily and check for new announcements, and assignments, (d) contact the computer information system office if they are encountering technical problems, and (e) seek for help if they are struggling with a class.
The academic advisor should make the student feel comfortable in the new learning environment. In addition to the previous recommendations, academic advisors should check with the students if they are meeting their basic needs (e.g. safe place, food, clothing), class needs (e.g. textbooks and other materials), technology access (e.g. computer, Internet access to participate in a synchronous class, Internet access to complete exams, access to email, access to a telephone), technology skills and comfort, and their current time zone. If students lack any of these needs to be successful in their online courses, advisors should seek support from the institution. Finally, advisors must remind students to maintain their routines and study habits that helped them be successful before transitioning to remote learning (Richmond University, n. d.).

3. Conclusion
The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an array of challenges to higher education institutions around the world. This past spring, most colleges and universities across the U.S. moved their classroom to online instruction. They also moved other campus operations to an online format delivery, such as the academic advising services. The pandemic has forced the higher education institutions to reexamine the way they provide services to a diverse group of students. Now, more than ever, students need the expertise of well-versed academic advisors that can help them make the correct academic choices, navigate the various academic options, be successful in their degree programs, and follow the new policies the institutions are currently implementing and will continue to follow. When providing online advising services, it is prominent that a pertinent selection of the appropriate technological tools to foster engagement and commitment becomes essential.

Virtual academic advising has helped higher education institutions that offer online courses and programs that engage and retain distance learners. Therefore, during a pandemic or in uncertain times, it is highly recommended that colleges and universities offer equitable online advising services to help the students that have transitioned to online learning succeed in their programs of study and make the correct choices. When implementing a virtual advising model, it is recommended not only to use the correct technology tools to support this service but also, to use a combination of the different advising approaches to suit the students’ needs. Additionally, advisors must follow the virtual best practices when advising students. Higher education institutions also need to provide their advisors with the appropriate support, training, and resources so that they can successfully assist the students.

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