

CASE STUDY

Breaking Barriers for First-Year
Students: NAU's Virtual Advising Hub



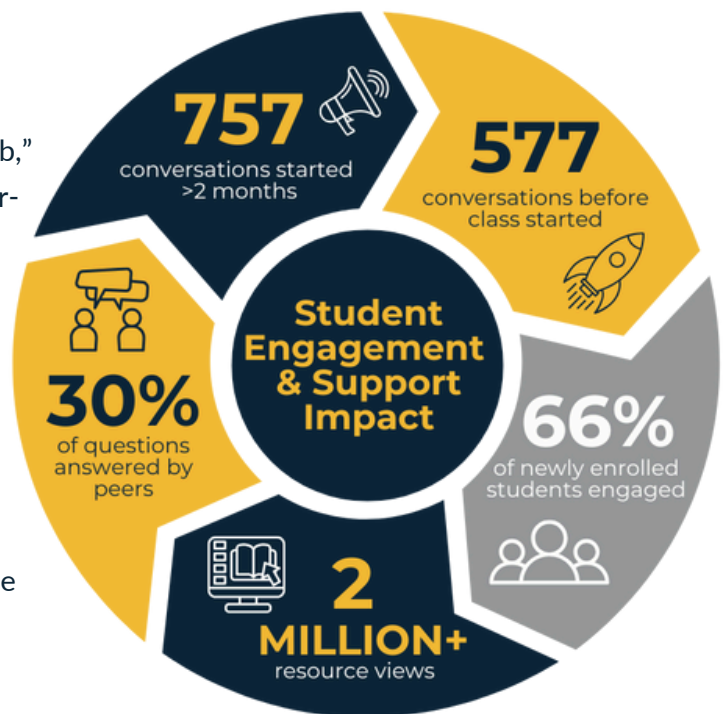
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northern Arizona University (NAU) places connection and a sense of belonging at the core of its student support initiatives. Its intentionally inclusive experience empowers students to thrive personally and academically. Throughout the student experience, NAU offers a range of programs and activities that help students build campus connections, develop essential skills for success, and equip them with the tools to excel.

A student's initial onboarding and orientation experience is a critical step in setting the stage for the student experience and helping them to engage with necessary resources and connections that support their success. NAU saw an opportunity to revamp their onboarding and orientation experience, in order to provide a program that was accessible, equitable, and comprehensive. As a rural serving, open access institution, NAU students have unique needs and 46% identify as first-generation college students. NAU recognized the need to diversify their onboarding programming and provide multiple opportunities for students to engage.

As a part of this larger redesign, NAU University Advising partnered with InScribe to create a virtual community supported by grant funding from the Arizona Innovation Alliance. Named the "Advising Hub," this online space centralizes resources, facilitates peer-to-peer interactions, and offers flexible engagement pathways. It provides equitable access to resources, seamless connections with advisors, and a space for students to ask questions and foster the connections required for success.

Through its partnership with InScribe, NAU has redefined student support for incoming students, creating an environment where learners can overcome challenges and thrive. With plans to expand the initiative, NAU continues to set a new standard for empowering diverse student populations.



"InScribe enabled us to scale our student support services without losing the personal connection that is so vital to student success. By centralizing resources and fostering peer interactions, we created an inclusive environment where students could find answers anytime."

Terri Hayes, Associate Vice President for Academic Support and University Advising

ABOUT NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

Northern Arizona University, founded in 1899, is a public institution located in Flagstaff, Arizona, offering a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs.

Serving over 30,000 students across its main campus, statewide locations, and online programs, NAU is dedicated to providing accessible, high-quality education. Renowned for its commitment to student success, NAU emphasizes

innovative teaching, research, and personalized learning experiences. With a focus on sustainability, cultural diversity, and fostering community, NAU combines a rich history with forward-thinking initiatives to prepare learners for a rapidly changing world. Learn more at <https://nau.edu/>.



THE CHALLENGE

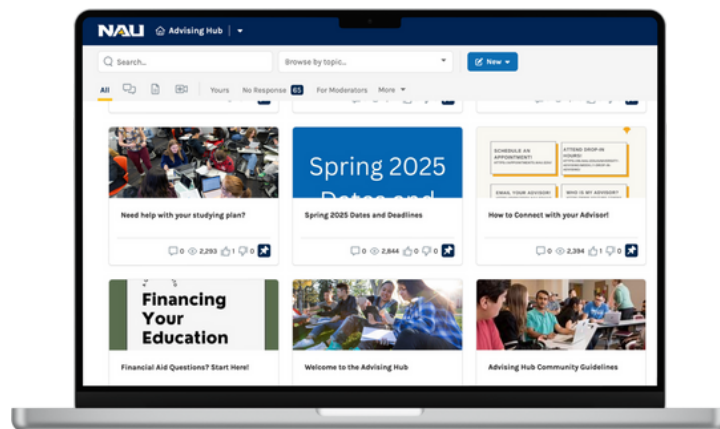
Northern Arizona University was challenged to rethink onboarding and new student advising to ensure all students had access and equal opportunity to resources and tools that support a successful transition. While academic advisors connect with new students throughout the months leading up to a new year, they struggled to track students through the process and were concerned that not all students were getting the details they needed to prepare. As Helen Bailey Hemmer, Director of Academic Support, noted, “we wanted to ensure that all students, in particular first-generation students coming to college for the first time, had easy access to the resources and tools. We knew we needed to diversify opportunities to connect, offering multiple pathways for students to engage with advisors and university resources.”

For first-generation students, the transition to university can be overwhelming. Many lack the institutional knowledge or support networks to navigate systems, access resources, or connect with faculty. This problem can be further compounded for students from rural areas, who often face geographic isolation and competing demands such as family or work responsibilities.

To address these concerns, NAU sought to develop an inclusive and flexible support system that would ensure every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, could access the resources they needed to succeed. The university recognized the importance of creating virtual pathways for support, diversifying engagement opportunities, and using actionable data to proactively identify and assist students at risk.

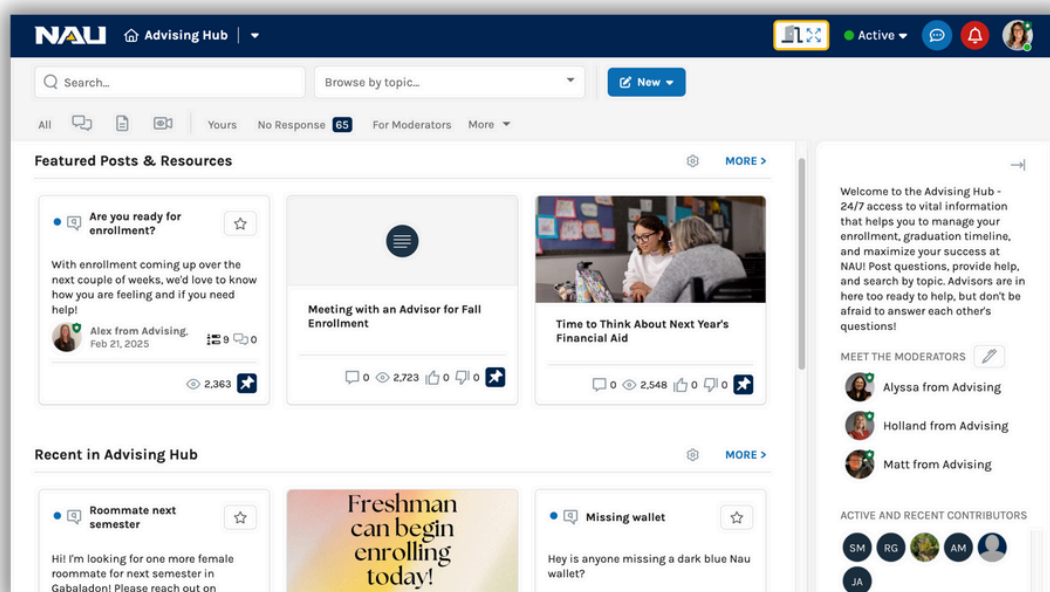
THE SOLUTION

Through its participation in the Arizona Innovation Alliance (AIA), NAU was introduced to InScribe, a virtual community platform that had seen successful implementation at Arizona State University. With grant funding from AIA, NAU adopted InScribe to create its centralized Advising Hub designed to support onboarding and first-year and transfer students on the Flagstaff Mountain residential campus by providing accessible virtual pathways for connection, guidance, and resources.



Led by Terri Hayes, Associate Vice President for Academic Support and University Advising, and Helen Bailey Hemmer, Director for Academic Support and University Advising, the project brought together a collaborative team of advisors, case managers, operations staff, and technical support specialists. Drawing on expertise shared by colleagues at Arizona State University, the team observed demonstrations, reviewed setups, and adapted best practices to streamline the implementation process. Hemmer reflected that this partnership allowed NAU to avoid starting from scratch and instead build on a strong foundation.

To ensure success, NAU developed a comprehensive moderation plan that prioritized timely and accurate responses to student inquiries, fostering trust and engagement. Advisors and moderators received training to effectively manage posts and create a supportive virtual environment for students. The Advising Hub became a space where students could access resources, ask questions, and connect with advisors and peers. It complemented NAU's existing support infrastructure while leveraging technology and human connection to scale its impact.



THE OUTCOMES

The implementation of InScribe delivered immediate benefits, reinforcing NAU's commitment to fostering connections and enhancing student support. During the summer months, student participation exceeded expectations, with students initiating a total of 757 conversations or questions in less than 2 months. Even before classes began, 577 conversations were already underway, highlighting proactive student engagement during the critical onboarding period. This active engagement helped students pose questions, access key onboarding materials, and create an early sense of community.

Approximately 66% of all newly enrolled residential students engaged with the Advising Hub during the fall semester, reflecting widespread adoption. On average, each student accessed 21 resources, contributing to a total of over 2 million views, showcasing the platform's effectiveness in centralizing essential information.

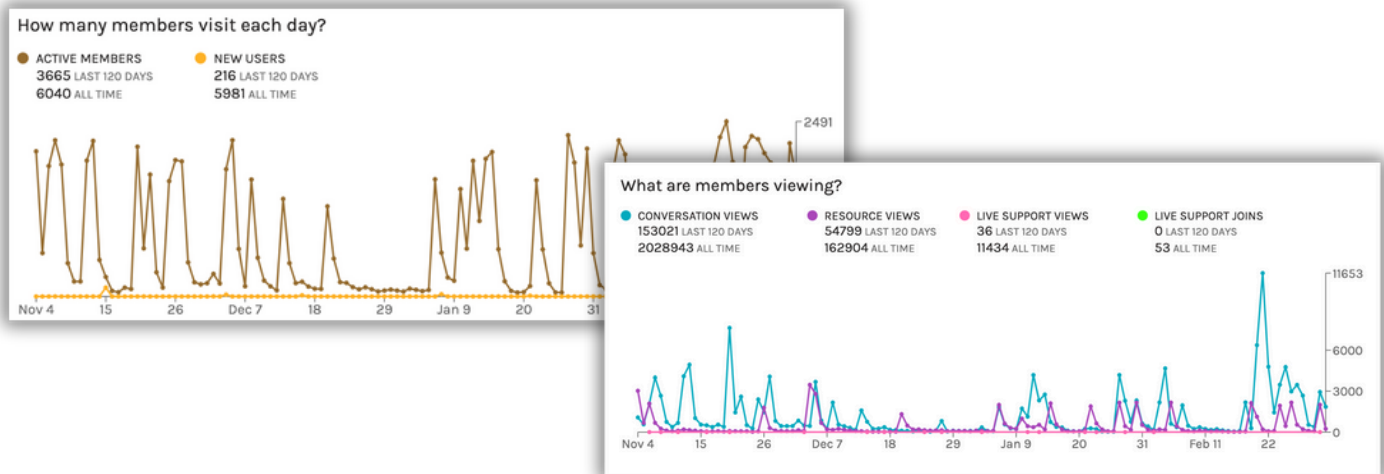
This high level of activity continued as students transitioned to university life, with the Advising Hub serving as a vital resource for navigating challenges. For students unsure of what questions to ask, the platform's peer-to-peer interaction became a valuable learning tool. Approximately 30% of questions were answered by peers, highlighting the community-driven nature of the platform. This dynamic not only fostered collaboration but also enabled students to learn from the experiences and insights shared by others, creating a supportive and inclusive environment.

“The Advising Hub helped us to refine how we support students, especially those who often feel disconnected during the transition to university life. The ability for students to help each other while seamlessly connecting with advisors has been a positive boost to the student experience”

Helen Bailey Hemmer, Director for Academic Support and University Advising

Additionally, the conversation and questions asked in the platform presumably reduced the volume of emails in advisor inboxes, allowing advisors to shift their focus to students requiring the most support.

These outcomes demonstrate NAU’s ability to combine personalized support with innovative technology. By fostering early engagement, promoting peer-driven learning, and empowering advisors with data-driven insights, NAU addressed immediate challenges while creating a scalable and inclusive foundation for student success.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Building on the success of the Advising Hub, Northern Arizona University is expanding its grant-funded initiative into the next year. A second community is being developed to specifically support online learners, ensuring equitable access to resources, peer connections, and advising support. NAU also plans to transform the existing community, “Advising Hub” into the “NAU Hub,” a comprehensive space addressing broader topics such as housing, parking, and student organizations.

To maximize the platform’s potential, NAU is bringing together a cross-divisional moderation team, integrating expertise from Student Affairs and Enrollment Management to create a seamless and inclusive experience. As Helen Bailey Hemmer shared, the NAU Hub is seen as a transformative tool for onboarding and beyond. These efforts reflect NAU’s commitment to leveraging technology to meet the diverse needs of its student population.

Northern Arizona University’s implementation of the Advising Hub reflects its commitment to fostering connections, inclusivity, and student success. By addressing challenges with innovative solutions, NAU has set a new benchmark for student support systems in higher education. As the initiative evolves, NAU continues to empower all students to thrive and achieve their goals, regardless of background or circumstances.



Ready to increase learner outcomes?

Get started today! Your community can be set up in as little as 10 business days.

Plus, your dedicated customer success team will ensure a successful launch and assist with the long-term health of your community. Request more information at

hello@inscribeapp.com.