



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF ARIZONA

**Location:** Tucson, AZ

**Focus Areas:** Academic supports; Advising;  
Career Exploration; Community

As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), land-grant, and Research 1 university with nearly 35,000 undergraduates, University of Arizona (UA) serves all students with a focus on racially minoritized students and on students who are first-generation, from low-income households, or have transferred from other institutions.



### At A Glance:

- » Adapted the Student Success and Retention Innovation unit, a hub of eight distinct departments and a strategy team, to virtually support student learning
- » Used technology to provide a suite of virtual supports, including microaffirmation messages, chat services, an interactive major exploration fair, and a summer bridge program

## Approach Overview

The University of Arizona's [Student Success and Retention Innovation](#) (SSRI) is a hub of eight distinct departments and a strategy team that works to support the success of undergraduate students. During the pandemic, SSRI moved swiftly to a 100% virtual format using technology to replicate, assist, and augment all of the activity previously performed face-to-face. UA's innovative responses to the demand for virtual support, led to the highest ever increase in 1st-2nd year retention at the institution. SSRI's virtual support services, include:

- » Launch Pad: a learning management space for the transition to virtual learning;
- » SOS: an email, chat, and text service available to answer any question, any time;
- » Virtual Drop-In Advising and a Major Exploration Fair: moving the tried-and true in-person major fair to an interactive, engaging, and informative virtual experience;
- » New Start: successfully moving a summer bridge program that has been a hallmark of student success at the UA for 50+ years to an online platform;
- » Microaffirmation messages through social media;
- » Pulse surveys to quickly gather feedback on the students experience; and
- » OfficeVibe surveys to monitor student success staff moral and engagement.

SSRI worked with campus partners to create the cross-functional Student Data Insights Strategy Team to monitor student access of services and identify actionable insights. This team became essential to ensuring support services were delivered equitably to students online. Group members meet weekly to assess data, identify emerging needs, and pinpoint opportunities to deliver exemplary virtual support. Examining the demographics of the students accessing services gives the institution insight into who is accessing SSRI virtually and who exhibits changed behaviors since the virtual switch.

Working with campus partners, SSRI aided in the distribution of emergency aid, laptops, wireless routers for mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, and even hubs across the state where students in rural communities could drive to a safe location to access classes and virtual student support services.

SSRI uses multiple platforms including Zoom and Microsoft Teams for virtual one-on-one appointments, meetings, peer mentoring, workshops, and social events; Salesforce for mass communications and texting; Desire to Learn (D2L) for learning management; various gaming platforms including Discord, Jackbox and Kahoot for advising and social events; TutorTrac and AdvisorTrac for course tutoring and academic advising; and Qualtrics for surveying. For math support, UA uses Desmos, an online graphing calculator and activity builder. Learning specialists use Panopto, a video and quiz platform, as well as Jamboard, a shared space for brainstorming and collaboration online. SSRI also uses OfficeVibe for student success staff morale, team building, and support.

The institution's approach is further illustrated through the following quotes:

“We’ve thought very intentionally about the virtual supports and services to provide, but also about the mindsets, perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs that are critical to creating a community with a strong sense of belonging.”

“When we went online, we found that a typical academic advising appointment that would take 45 minutes was now taking an hour and 15 minutes and that students were asking about everything. It was because they just had someone’s attention, so the conversation very quickly went from, ‘I need help dropping this class,’ to, ‘What about if I don’t Wi-Fi connection?’ and what about all of these other things? Everything just started taking a lot longer, so time was even more of a premium.”

“Tech is a big part of this story, but really I think the reason why we stayed together and survived was all of this other work and the care that we were able to extend to our staff.”

Learn more at [virtualsuccess.naspa.org](https://virtualsuccess.naspa.org)