Hosting online open houses & online/virtual office hours

A virtual open house can be an information session, webinar, or other interactive program that provides prospective students with the opportunity to ask questions either via video, chat, or audio while a staff member responds to questions and provides program information in real time. These should be planned on adult student-friendly schedules with a variety of available dates and times. The event could be offered on a Tuesday evening, Thursday at noon, and/or a Saturday morning, giving prospective students the ability to "attend" the event either after regular office hours, during a lunch break, or on a weekend from their office, home, or a local library.

An online open house event should provide:
- ✓ general information about the program;
- ✓ program requirements;
- ✓ the portfolio process; and
- ✓ financial aid.

By making information available to the students on their schedule from a space they consider safe and non-threatening, they will be more open to participation. Prospective students can access the event from anywhere with a computer and an internet connection. Adult learners often juggle many responsibilities between work, home, and their community.

Here are some helpful resources to help you reach prospective adult students without breaking the bank or overextending your staff. The services listed below will enable you to host events or hold office hours outside of the traditional work schedule and from anywhere with an internet connection. You aren't required to use these specific services; these are merely suggestions to assist you in providing online support to your students as a part of the RBA Today program commitment requirements.

To conduct virtual or online open houses via voice or text chat, you will need:
- A computer with an Internet connection. (The connection should be stronger than dial-up, preferably broadband service.)
- Someone to lead the virtual open houses, virtual office hours, or online chats. This can be different people at different times, if staffing allows.

To conduct virtual or online open houses with video and/or voice chat, you will need the following items (in addition to the list above):
- A microphone and speakers that can be connected to your computer. (Most laptops have them built in.)
- A web cam. (Check out some options on Amazon.com. Make sure that the one you purchase will work with the video conferencing option you choose. Most web cams will work with all of the video options provided below.)

Examples of services you can use to host online events

There may be services already available at your institution, which could save you time and money. You should contact the admissions, recruitment, or communications staff at your institution to see what's already available. The following is a list of suggestions – please note: this list is not exhaustive, and inclusion on this list does NOT represent an endorsement by the Commission.

Chat resources - Providing "online office hours" will allow your current and prospective students to reach you via chat. Many people are more comfortable asking a question via chat rather than in person. Through chat programs, prospective students can connect to you via your screen name. Publishing your screen name on materials, including your business cards and the RBA site, is a good way to let students know that you are available. It's good to create a screen name that relates to the program and/or institution. It's also beneficial to note what times you are available to chat like "online office hours". That way, they know when to expect you to be online. Options for text-based chatting include:

- ✓ **Meebo** – This service can link multiple chat services into one place. That way, users from a variety of different chat services can contact you and you only have to monitor/run one service. You can also embed the Meebo chat screen into your website so that students can ask questions right from the website without needing a specific chat service or username.
- ✓ **Google Chat** – This also has a video feature.
- ✓ **Facebook Chat**
- ✓ **MySpace IM**
- ✓ **AIM or AOL IM**
- ✓ **Yahoo! Messenger**
- ✓ **ICQ**

Skype – This is a VOIP (voice over internet protocol) service that allows you to talk to many individuals at once. Talking via Skype, through the free program installed on a computer, is free. However, if you want people to call in from mobile or land-line phones or if you want to call them, you can sign up for the unlimited national calling plan for $5.95 a month. The unlimited world plan is $12.95 per month. Skype conference calling features do not support video at this time. However, for one-on-one calls, two people could video conference and meet "face-to-face" without being in the same location. Both the program and mobile application are free resources and can be downloaded at Skype.com.

UStream.tv – This service allows users to broadcast and chat with "viewers." Viewers can chat with you (the host) and all other participants in the broadcast via the on-screen chat feature. This is a one-way video option that allows you to address questions either in the chat screen or on camera. The staff member would be able to broadcast video and voice to answer questions and provide information, but the viewers can only ask questions via chat. This service archives your broadcasts so that prospective students who missed the event can watch it later. You can also brand the look of your Ustream page so that it matches your website and/or meets institutional branding standards.

ooVoo – This service is similar to Skype, but features additional video capabilities. ooVoo allows six people to talk via video at the same time, and an additional six can join by phone. For $39.95, you can have the capability to be "available" online when you have office hours so that students can "stop by" and ask questions or discuss concerns with you. Callers would download the free software on the ooVoo website to join the call or if they prefer not to download the software, they can use their web browser to participate. You can video conference from anywhere including a classroom that's used for an RBA course so that prospective students can see where they might attend classes or from the student center, etc. You're not tied to your desk or office as long as you have a laptop, internet connection, and web cam.

ivisit – This service is also like Skype and ooVoo, but you can video conference with up to 8 users and share your desktop and files at the same time. This service is $4.95 per month or $45.95 per year. The software to run the calls is free, which means that your participants would not be charged to use the service. Note: The mobile application is only supported by Windows Mobile devices, which means that iPhone would not be supported.

DimDim – This is similar to the other video and conferencing services The website states, "Give presentations, share web pages, whiteboards, voice, video – even record your events - with no software to install and with no hassles." There are free options: a limit of 20 people on a conference with one video host, and there are paid options: 2 video participants/hosts with 50-100 person meetings (depending on the package). The paid services also give you the option to brand the screen to make it match your website and/or meet institutional branding standards. Paid services range from $25 per month to $75 per month.

GoToMeeting – This service has the capability to have many participants involved in the events. There are several different pricing options and pricing varies. If you would like more information about GoToMeeting or GoToTraining, check out their pricing page.

Adobe Connect – This service offers screen sharing, virtual classroom options, and simple conferencing options as well. It is a more expensive option and charges per user, but is widely known as a strong conferencing solution. Pricing varies but starts at $45 per month per host. Visit the pricing page for more details. Special pricing and opportunities can be available to higher education institutions. Visit the Adobe Connect for Education page for more information.

WebEx – This service has both voice and video conferencing features with packages starting at $25 a month. This includes unlimited meetings with up to 25 people in each conference. For more information or a free trial, visit their product overview page.

Conferencecall.com – This offers voice components for multiple callers. There is a video component where the host can share their screen for a presentation. The participants can discuss what's being shown on screen. No prices are available online and the company provides pricing only by request. Visit www.conferencecall.com for more information.

We want to hear about your events!

Let us know at least one month in advance, and we will post your events on CFWV.com.

You can submit your event by:

- ✓ emailing Jennifer Wood at jwood@hepc.wvnet.edu;

- ✓ calling Jennifer Wood at (304) 558-4614; or

- ✓ submitting the online form at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/rbaoncampusevent.

What you need to provide in your submission (regardless of your submission method):

- ✓ Contact Information - Please make sure that the contact information provided is for the person a student should contact if they need more information on the event or if they have any issues or questions.
    - o Institution:
    - o Address:
    - o City/Town:
    - o State:
    - o ZIP:
    - o Email Address:
    - o Phone Number:

- ✓ Date and time of your event

- ✓ Any logistical details (e.g. location of the event, etc.)

- ✓ URL (web link) where prospective students can register or access the virtual event

- ✓ A short description of the event

Examples:

West Virginia University uses Wimba to conduct online information sessions and other virtual events. For more information about this software, contact Julie Whiteman at Julie.Whiteman@mail.wvu.edu or 1-800-253-2762. To see a registration page for all of their online presentations, visit http://elearn.wvu.edu/info/index.html#virtual.