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Utilization of the Scheduling Software Platform, YouCanBookMe

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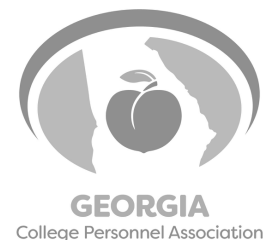
Rooted in the influential work of Tinto's (1993) theory of academic integration, it is clear that faculty and student interactions foster student development and success in college (Astin, 1993; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Laird & Cruce, 2009; Light, 2001; Tauber, 1997; Twale & Sanders, 1999). Faculty who are perceived as being available to students outside of the classroom are viewed as ideal (Epting, Zinn, Buskist, & Buskist, 2004). When defining the attributes of the ideal faculty, students share that approachability is the second most desirable trait in a professor, with teaching skills being the most desired and organization being the least important (Sanders et al., 2000). Reinforcing this benefit of faculty interaction, Kuh and Hu (2001) remind us that "In general, for most students most of the time, the more interaction with faculty the better" and that "... student-faculty interaction encourages students

to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college" (p. 329).

There is a relationship between *instructor immediacy* (the behaviors that reduce the barriers between faculty and students) and faculty/student interactions (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Cooper & Bronwell, 2018; Cooper, Haney, et al., 2017). This should be a calling for faculty to examine their pedagogy in an effort to intentionally build this intimacy within their classrooms. Arguably, this perception of approachability and availability is even more important in online courses. In face-to-face classes, students are afforded the opportunity to informally interact with the professor before and/or after class to ask questions and discuss class content. This interaction is notable, as Nadler and Nadler (2000) found that higher levels of informal interactions with faculty is positively correlated with academic

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success, satisfaction, and retention. For students in fully online courses, the lack of direct informal access to the professor can create an unintended barrier for communication. Consequently, “it can cause them to feel they are in an “online abyss and must sink or swim on their own” (Tolman et al., 2019, p.75).

For student affairs professionals, this interaction with students outside of the classroom is second nature to them, as they engage with students in this way every day. To that end, it comes as no surprise there is a relationship between the work of student affairs professionals and student development (Martin, 2013; Martin & Seifert, 2011). The influential work of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reminds us that students being involved in our campus communities and taking on leadership positions has a positive impact on their development and success. Recognizing the importance of this student interaction and need for involvement, student affairs professionals have risen to the challenge and created an expansive array of leadership opportunities and mechanisms to engage students on college campuses. Kuh (2009) acknowledges this dedication of student affairs professionals, asserting that “Over the past twenty-five years, student affairs professionals have traditionally been among the first on campus to acknowledge, embrace, and attempt to apply research-based innovative practices” (p. 699), and

calls for the profession of student affairs to continually evolve what engagement looks like and how it impacts student success. As student affairs professionals continue to innovate and find ways to engage with students, the need to be available to meet with students increases as well.

To increase the perception of their availability and approachability, faculty and administrators should give consideration to creating seamless mechanisms for students to initiate conversations with their faculty and student affairs professionals. To that end, faculty and student affairs professionals could embrace utilizing technology (Moneta, 2005), like the software platform ‘YouCanBookMe’, to eliminate barriers to having this pivotal interaction with students outside the classroom. This review will further detail the ‘YouCanBookMe’ platform, share how it has been used by a faculty member to interact with students, provide the perspective from a student who has used it to interact with their faculty, and provide implications for practice for faculty and student affairs professionals.

About ‘YouCanBookMe’

YouCanBookMe is a website platform, www.youcanbook.me, that integrates a user’s Google Calendar with an online scheduling software that enables individuals to schedule appointments at their

convenience during identified times/days by the owner of the calendar. When creating their YouCanBookMe page, the user syncs the platform with their Google Calendar and the availability they want individuals to choose from. When individuals go to the respective YouCanBookMe website for that user, they will see in real-time the availability of appointments and can select an open day/time at their convenience. Once the individual has scheduled an appointment, the owner of the calendar will receive an email notification as well as the appointment being placed directly onto their Google Calendar for that scheduled time. In other words, faculty and student affairs professionals can block off days/times they want students/colleagues to schedule meetings with them in the YouCanBookMe website. From there, the student/colleague can visit the YouCanBookMe site for that individual and see not only these blocks of days/times, but also know which times are still available. As meetings get scheduled through YouCanBookMe or when the faculty/administrator manually puts meetings during those times into their Google Calendar, those times are greyed out in the system and cannot be booked for an appointment.

The YouCanBookMe (2021) website explains how the platform works in six simple steps: 1) Connect your Google or Microsoft calendar, 2) Create your booking page, 3)

Share your booking page, 4) Individuals schedule appointments via your booking page, 5) Booked appointments sync straight to your calendar, and 6) The meeting takes place accordingly. YouCanBookMe offers both a free and paid version of the software. The free version affords you to integrate your calendar with the bookings and create a customized booking page, however, the booking page and accompanying emails contain the YouCanBookMe branding logo. Upgrading to the paid account, \$10/month, unlocks more features and customizations, as well removing the YouCanBookMe branding from the booking page and emails.

Faculty Use of YouCanBookMe (perspective from S.Tolman)

The impetus for my initial use and now utter reliance on using YouCanBookMe came from seeking out a solution for scheduling meetings with students. As a newly appointed Program Director of a HE/SA Program, I quickly became overwhelmed with trying to schedule the volume of meetings with students on a weekly basis. I found that I was playing an endless game of email tag, where the student would ask my availability, but by the time they saw my response, those days/times had already passed. That would then spawn the next round of email tag in what felt like an endless loop. My search for a solution to that scheduling problem brought

me to YouCanBookMe, which has met my needs and more for the last eight years (even using only the free version of the software, though I am often tempted to upgrade for some of the more robust features). The power of this scheduling platform cannot be overstated. It allows you to establish which

days/times you want to be available to meet (i.e. advising appointments, interviews with candidates, scheduled office hours appointments, etc.) and for you to simply give that link to individuals to schedule at their convenience (Figure 1).

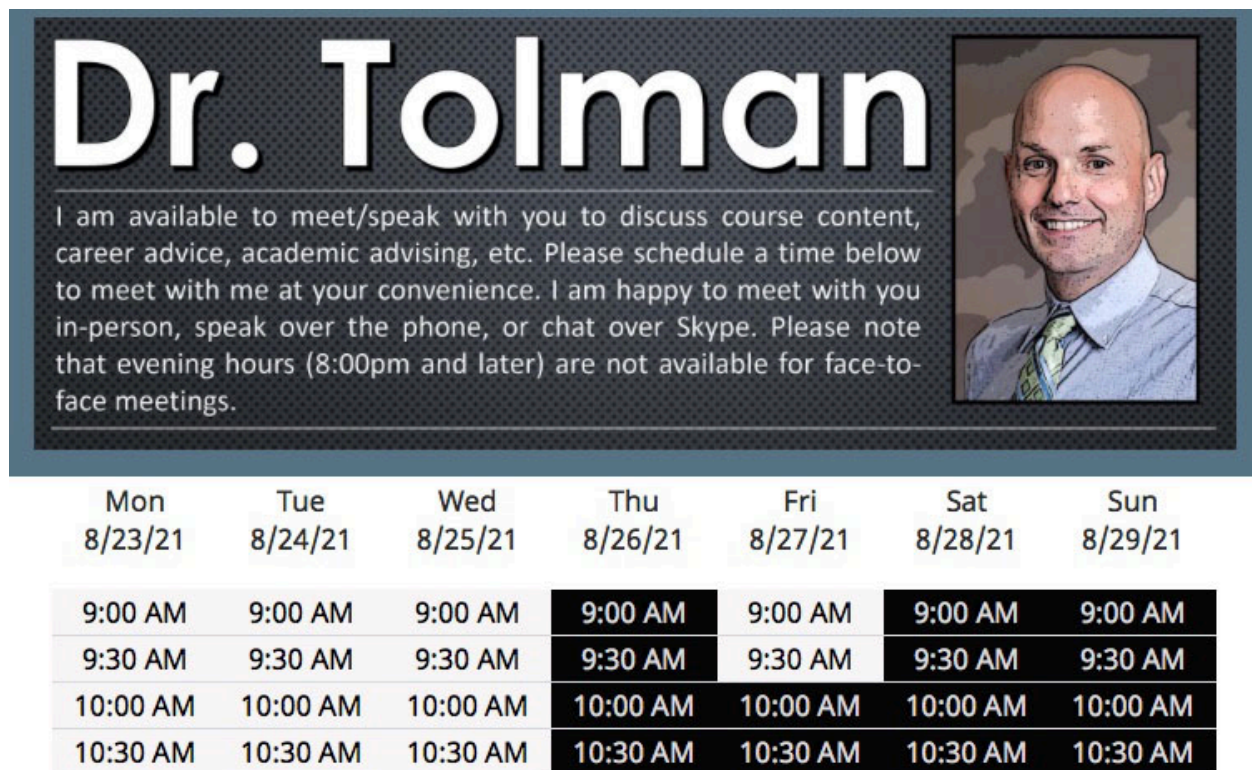


Figure 1. Availability that students view when going to respective YouCanBookMe site

There is no more email tag of a student requesting to setup a meeting, which is then often followed by several emails to coordinate said meeting. Instead, students can go right to your YouCanBookMe booking page and schedule meetings as they need. This booking page allows you to customize the information that students complete when

scheduling an appointment such as input boxes for “what would you like to discuss at this meeting?” (Figure 2). This frees you up from a significant number of emails while helping students to feel more connected to you and perceive that you have even greater availability as a meeting with you is only a click away for them. In my course syllabi and

email address is a link to my YouCanBookMe page. I also provide students with a video tutorial of how to schedule a meeting with

using the YouCanBookMe platform (view video at <https://youtu.be/kv11tqm7BZQ>).

BOOKING:

Wednesday, August 25, 2021 10:00 AM


<p>MEETING LENGTH?</p> <p>30 minutes</p>	<p>NAME</p>
<p>EMAIL</p>	<p>PREFERRED FORMAT?</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> Phone (call 989.492.0024)</p>
<p>WHICH PHONE NUMBER IS BEST FOR ME TO CALL YOU AT FOR OUR MEETING? WHILE UNLIKELY, SHOULD I BE RUNNING LATE AND/OR NEED TO CANCEL UNEXPECTEDLY, I WILL SEND YOU A TEXT MESSAGE TO LET YOU KNOW.</p> <p> e.g. (201) 555-0123</p>	<p>TO HELP ME PREPARE FOR OUR CONVERSATION, PLEASE LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS.</p>
<p><input type="button" value="Confirm Booking"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/></p>	

Figure 2. Appointment form students complete to schedule appointment via YoucanBookMe

Even better than the fact that YouCanBookMe facilitates the scheduling of appointments based on the availability from your Google Calendar (during the blocks you've set to be able to be scheduled), is that YouCanBookMe integrates and automatically syncs the scheduled appointments into your calendar (Figure 3). They will automatically populate and will include all of the information you collected from the student in the

booking page. For example, my bookings all provide the preferred meeting format (in-person, phone, or Zoom), the student's cell phone number in case I need to reach them, and a brief synopsis of why they want to meet with me. As these meetings are scheduled, I receive an email confirmation of this information as well as it goes directly into my calendar.

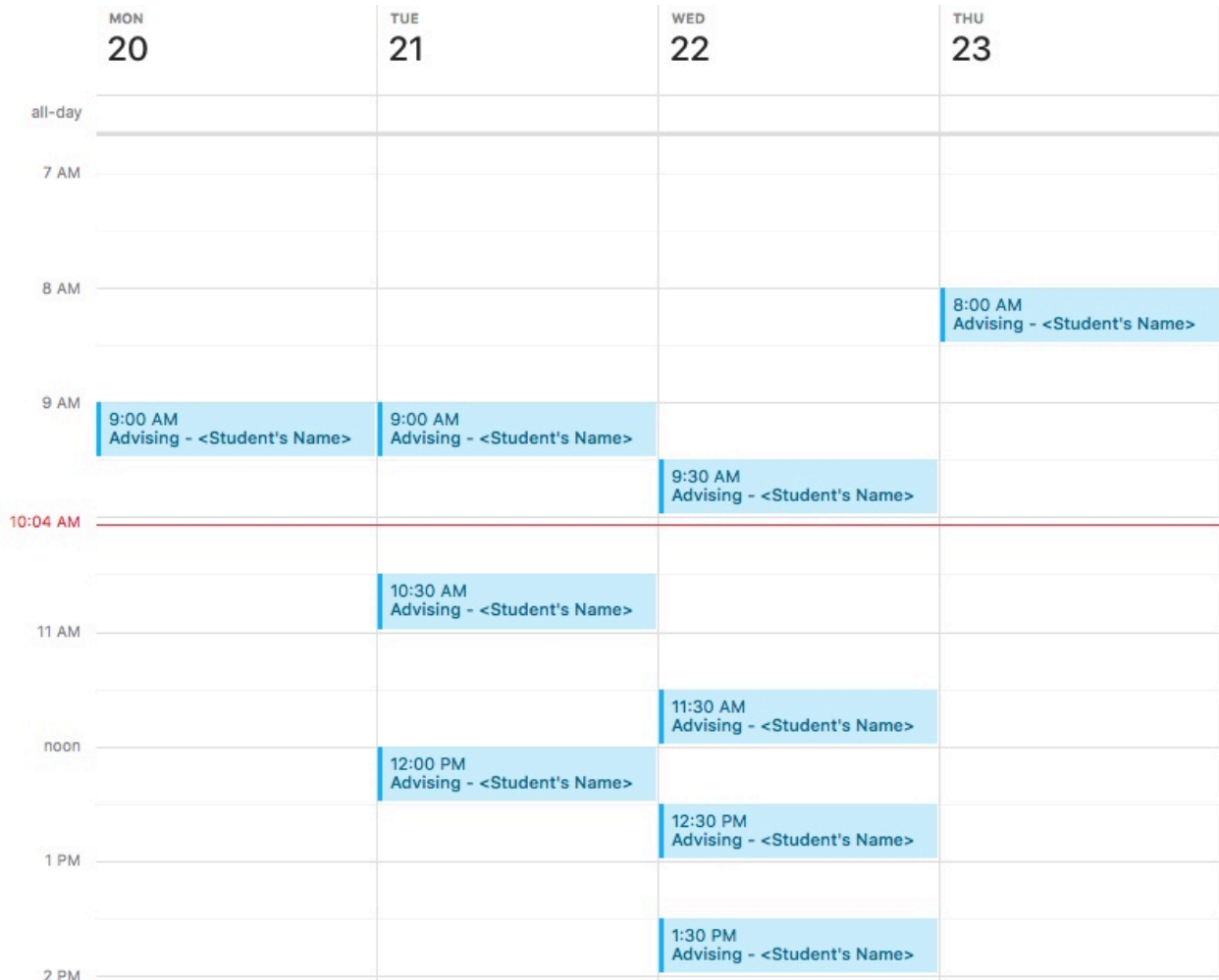


Figure 3. Scheduled appointments go directly into Google Calendar, including the information the student submitted in the scheduling form when booking the appointment

**Student Experience with YouCanBookMe
(perspective from S.Derfus)**

As an online student, it is easy to feel disconnected from the academic environment. You miss out on the campus experience which includes frequent interactions with campus staff and faculty. Experiencing traditional, hybrid, and online courses at different stages of my academic career, I have found the online environment beneficial on many fronts, yet often lacking convenient access to

meaningful interactions with my professors. Outside of attending scheduled office hours, which is often not an option for online students, the most common method I have encountered to request synchronous advisement or feedback is to arrange a mutually agreeable meeting time through emails or phone calls. These methods can be an exercise in patience and perseverance, often culminating in a belated meeting only after a

long string of back-and-forth emails or voice messages.

I was recently introduced to YouCanBookMe, an online scheduling platform, to schedule a meeting with my professor for feedback on an assignment. Initially I was skeptical that any method other than a traditional email or phone call was necessary to arrange a meeting, but I tried it and was pleasantly surprised with the ease of use and functionality of the program. I simply went to my professor's YouCanBookMe website where I saw a calendar with their availability – no back-and-forth messaging to find a time that worked for both of us. After selecting the time that worked for me, I entered the requested information and booked the appointment. A confirmation was sent to my email and with a single click I could add it to my calendar, cancel, or reschedule the meeting. I also received a reminder a day before the appointment date from YouCanBookMe and on the day of the appointment from my calendar alerts.

As a student, I feel the value in time saved, immediacy, and practicality makes YouCanBookMe an effective program to integrate into any communication plan that manages scheduled meetings. I would not hesitate to use such a program to connect with my professors in the future and I believe it has the potential to improve student perception of faculty accessibility, leading to

more frequent and meaningful interactions with their professors.

Potential Applications

In addition to the use by faculty to meet with students in their courses and/or program, the YouCanBookMe platform has a number of potential applications for student affairs professionals. The obvious use is in scheduling meetings with students and colleagues. An administrator can simply include a link to their YouCanBookMe page at the bottom of their email and facilitate scheduling meetings through this platform. Functional areas that meet frequently with students and colleagues could greatly benefit from this, including Academic Advising, Residence Life, Student Conduct, Tutoring Services, etc. An interesting application could utilize the creation of a new Google Calendar to sync with YouCanBookMe for the sole purpose of scheduling around an event. For example, student leadership interviews (i.e. Resident Assistant Selection and Orientation Leader Selection) draw a significant number of candidates who must schedule an interview. A department could simply create a Google Calendar dedicated to this selection process and have students schedule their interviews through YouCanBookMe.

Conclusion

Recognizing the importance of engagement between students and faculty/student affairs professionals (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), Moneta (2005) reminds us that technology plays by a critical role in working with college students, stating that “The quality of our services to students and others is directly associated with the efficiency and effectiveness of our business process transactions, and increasingly, these processes have become automated through a plethora of technological applications” (p.13). To that end, YouCanBookMe is a powerful platform that can not only simplify the meeting scheduling process, but can also help to automate it by removing a barrier in students scheduling meetings in the first place. Removing this barrier fosters instructor immediacy and faculty/student interaction (Chesebro &

McCroskey, 2001; Cooper & Bronwell, 2018; Cooper, Haney, et al., 2017).

The YouCanBookMe platforms allows students to schedule meetings at their convenience and eliminates the back-and-forth of emails to schedule such meetings. This ability to easily schedule meetings lends to students reaching out more often and can lead to increased perceptions of the availability and approachability of faculty and student affairs professionals. While there is a paid version of YouCanBookMe that offers many great features, many users will find the free version meets most, if not all, of their needs. Regardless of which version is used, YouCanBookMe is a promising platform that can be utilized to not only increase efficiency, but to also enhance student engagement and interaction.

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Steven Tolman, Ed.D. is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education Administration at Georgia Southern University. His previous roles included serving as a Higher Education Administration program director and 12 years as a student affairs administrator in Residence Life, Student Conduct, and Student Life. He holds a Doctorate from Rutgers University, Master's from Texas Tech University, and Bachelor's from Central Michigan University. His research is theoretically informed and guided by the tenets of student development theory. In particular, he explores the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Kolb's Experiential Learning, Sanford's Model of Challenge and Support, and Astin's Theory of Involvement. This theoretical framework is intertwined with the two streams of his scholarly agenda: 1) The profession of student affairs and 2) The residential and co-curricular experience of college students.

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