ACADEMIC ADVISING

Academic advising, done well, can be an important tool for implementing both student and institutional success. The National Academic Advising Association has established a set of core principles to help guide advisors as they do their jobs. These basic principles are designed to establish a set of concise concepts through which advisors can develop their own specific techniques of advising. These principles help provide a common ground for all advisors as we develop our skills.
GENERAL PRINCIPLES ABOUT STUDENTS AND ADVISORS

Students:

• Students can be responsible for their own behavior.
• Students can be successful based upon their individual goals and efforts.
• Students have a desire to learn, but learning needs vary according to individual skills, goals, and experiences.
• Students have their own individual beliefs and opinions.

Advisors:

• Advisors are responsible to the students.
• Advisors are responsible for making thoughtful referrals.
• Advisors are responsible to their college.
• Advisors are advocates for student success and development.
• Advisors are responsible to uphold the integrity of higher education (and that of themselves) through their actions and words.
• Advisors advocate the value of higher education and foster development of diverse concepts and new ideas.
ADVISING: A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

Academic advising entails more than just answering questions. Advising also consists of a working relationship between the student and the faculty member based on a shared commitment to education and academic success.

BEING A GOOD DEVELOPMENTAL ADVISOR

The Ways and Means of Creating a Working Relationship

• Involve students in their own college experience.

• Explore with the students factors contributing to their past success.

• Display interest in the students’ academic work, extracurricular activities, and career goals.

• Encourage students to speak with department chairs, instructors, and other students before choosing a major.

• Discuss time management, study skills, and course planning techniques.

• Share with students your own experiences as a student and educator.

• Have students plan out their own schedule and then discuss it together.
ADVISOR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ADVISING

- Acquaint advisees with the core curriculum and departmental requirements, and College regulations, services, and opportunities.

- Help advisees understand their past educational achievements and how they are related to their present educational goals.

- Refer advisees to Career Services for assistance with self-assessment/career exploration services and individual career counseling.

- Help advisees plan each semester's program of courses and develop a plan for the completion of graduation requirements.

- Help students identify problems and areas in need of improvement and devise possible solutions/make educated referrals.

- Know your students’ interests and be aware of their culture so they can be advised of educational opportunities centered on them.

- Know about the Honors Program and its requirements.

- Be available, approachable, and flexible. Seek out advisees in informal settings.

- Be a good general resource concerning opportunities in the College and community.
STUDENT ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN ADVISING

Students have many responsibilities as they adopt an academic lifestyle and pursue excellence at the College. One crucial responsibility is to seek out and take advantage of the benefits gained through advising. To utilize the resources available to them through their advisor, students should:

- Learn the name, location, and office hours of their advisor.
- Schedule early appointments during the course selection/registration period, and be prepared for advisement (students should have a copy of the course offerings and have an idea of what they would like to take and possible time constraints).
- Attempt to clarify their interests, personal values, and goals with their advisor.
- Become familiar with the Core Curriculum and graduation requirements.
- Consult with their advisor concerning changes in their approved schedule (add/drop or being closed out of a course).
- Consult their advisor when in academic difficulty.
- Inform their advisor before changing majors, transferring to another college, or withdrawing from the College.
- Accept responsibility for making their own decisions.
THE ADVISING SESSION

To assist advisees in planning their academic programs, the advisor should do the following:

**Review and have on hand:**

- The registration procedure and registration schedule.
- A copy of the schedule of courses. The schedule with current enrollment can be viewed in Self-Service Banner.
- The current college catalog and past catalogs for reference.
- The student's advisement file with current advisee report and up-to-date flow sheet. Academic transcript information may be found in Self-Service Banner.
- This handbook.

**Discuss and evaluate:**

- Exploration of life goals (graduate school/work).
- Exploration of career/life goals.
- Selection of educational program.
- Selection of courses and classes.
GUIDELINES FOR ADVISING

• Explain which courses are required and which are recommended.

• Be sure the student has had adequate preparation/prerequisite for courses which are recommended (consult advisee report).

• Be alert to course sequence (within and outside major program).

• Help the student understand his/her total four-year program in relation to course planning.

• Assist the student in utilizing elective credit and make recommendations as to what would be most beneficial according to the student’s interests and goals. Elective credit can be used to:
  * enhance a concentration
  * fulfill more than one concentration
  * fulfill a minor program
  * fulfill a second major program, including education certification
  * explore other educational interests

• Keep in mind that the choices belong to the student and the advisor is only responsible to give accurate information and sound advice. If the advice is not taken, the advisor is not responsible. It is a good idea to make a note of advice given.

FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION

Graduation in eight semesters costs students less money and is likely to become a standard by which the college’s effectiveness is judged. Data indicates that students who earn at least 30 credits that count toward graduation before the beginning of their sophomore year have a better chance of persisting than students who don’t. Reading, writing, and math skills courses do not count toward graduation. **Students who fall behind can catch up by taking an additional course during a fall or spring semester or by taking courses at MCLA or at other colleges and having the credits transferred.** Courses taken off-campus must be identified on the Off-Campus Study Approval form before the course is taken.
SIGNING THE FORM

After the student has had the opportunity to select and schedule courses with guidance from the advisor, the advisor must “sign” the registration form. This is done by giving the student the registration PIN. It is prudent for the student to complete and the advisor to sign a paper registration form in the event that additional signatures are needed.

- Never sign a blank form.
- Signature of the advisor only indicates the student has been advised; it does not indicate agreement.
- Carefully note areas of disagreement and course recommendations in the student’s advising file.

REGISTRATION IN SELF-SERVICE BANNER

Students can view everything in their Self-Service Banner records that advisors can view. Registration for most courses is done in Banner using the special PIN you give them; giving them the PIN is like signing a registration form and indicates you have discussed courses with them. Some courses must be registered on paper. All registration is done during the window assigned to each student. Preferred access, or early registration, is for students with documented needs, Honors students (for Honors courses only), and varsity athletes who will be playing a sport during the semester for which they register.

ADVISING RECORDS

Advisors should record information in the advisee file that may be helpful in future advising sessions with the student, and/or used by other advisors in case of referral or change of major. The advisor should also keep a record of those courses that the student was advised to take as well as a record of the student's final selections. If the student changes majors or advisors, the advisor will be notified by Advising Services to forward the file to that office.

*Pages 1-8 were adapted from “NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising,” NACADA Journal, Volume 15, Spring 1995.*
WORKING WITH AT-RISK STUDENTS AND MAKING REFERRALS

Being an academic advisor is challenging in many ways. One thing that makes advising so challenging is the struggle to make a difference for the students you advise. Sometimes making a difference is as simple as taking the time to care and notice. Because of the contact you have with students, you are in an ideal position to notice a change in behavior that may indicate if a student is in trouble.

When students are in trouble or in crisis, it is imperative not to assume they can handle it or that they will find their way to the proper services on their own. Academic advisors must take the responsibility to see that students are given the proper support and referral resources when necessary.

These pages are designed as a guide to the resources available for at-risk students.

Your Responsibility as an Advisor

- Be open and supportive. Make students feel safe and welcome in your office.
- Decide how much time and energy you are willing or able to spend and know how to refer when you’ve reached your limit.
- Recognize the limits of your own knowledge and experience, and refer students to other resources when appropriate.
Warning Signs of Students at Risk

- Dramatic decline in academic performance (including frequent absences).
- Failure to meet deadlines, severe procrastination, difficulty concentrating.
- Loss of motivation, extreme test anxiety, fears about class participation and speaking in class.
- Alcohol or drug abuse.
- Physical illness, extreme weight loss, chronic fatigue.
- Problems with family or finances.
- References to suicide.*

*Note: Immediately refer to Counseling Services any student who refers to suicide or indicates that he/she may be suicidal.

Things you can do:

- Provide Support: Listen and validate feelings, and allow the student to express him/herself and feel understood.

- Provide Perspective: Help your student see problems in context and recognize the value of an alternative interpretation. Show him or her the big picture to help move the focus away from the upsetting issue.

- Provide Direction: Encourage the student to seek and try solutions. Give the student information and discuss possible avenues to solutions.

Sometimes giving support, perspective, and direction is not enough to help the student get back on track. This is when a referral becomes an option. Counseling Services is always available to discuss options, offer general advice, and help you evaluate a student's needs.
MAKING A REFERRAL*

• Set aside a time and place to talk to the student about your concerns. Be interested and friendly. Begin by describing your concerns.

• Try to assess what the student’s needs are. Encourage him/her to describe what he/she views as the problem. Use active listening principles and paraphrase what the student says for clarification.

• Help the student decide on a course of action; identify what service is appropriate.

• Explain the service you are suggesting and what the student can expect. Relay your own positive experience with seeking help from college services, if appropriate.

• Be prepared to counter resistance and to discuss negative stereotypes the student may have about seeking help.

• Allow the student to call the referral source from your office to schedule an appointment. Assure the student that she/he has made a responsible decision.

• Follow up with the student *directly* to show support and concern. (Counseling Services will not be able to share any information with you without a written release from the student.)

• Make a note of the referral in the student’s advising file.

*Realize that accepting the referral is the student’s decision. Don't be discouraged if the student rejects your suggestion. Be respectful and try again at another time.

The information and concepts above were taken in part and in summary from *Identifying and Referring Troubled Students: A Primer for Academic Advisors* by Deborah R. Allen and Ralph W. Trimble.