

For Faculty Advisors

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The Faculty Advisor's Role

The term academic advising lends itself to a variety of interpretations from a *pro forma* assistance in course selection to a developmental model that addresses the student's needs from a holistic perspective. Developmental advising was designed over forty-five years ago in reaction to a prescriptive approach to advising, built on a model which emphasized the authority of the advisor and the limitations of the student. In a developmental approach, advising is seen as an extension of teaching. The advising process is a responsibility shared by advisor and advisee.

Responsibilities of the Advisor

- **Establish a caring working relationship with your advisees.**
Remember that academic advising is a form of teaching that continues throughout the year. Scheduling classes is only one small aspect of advising.
- **Help students to clarify their goals.**
Initiating a discussion with your advisees about their goals will enable you to provide them with more meaningful advice as they make their academic plans.
- **Encourage students to begin planning for their future career.**
Planning for one's career is not something a student should begin in the senior year. It is a process that can start in their first semester on campus. Urge students to access the opportunities offered by advisors in the Career Connections Center.
- **Relate interest and abilities to plans.**
While it is important to encourage your advisees to take on challenges, it is also important that their decisions have some basis in reality. Sometimes a student's interest in a subject may far exceed their ability.
- **Assist advisees in exploring and selecting majors.**
Review departmental requirements with students as they explore potential academic directions. You'll find program details for each major, minor, and concentration on the Registrar's web site.
- **Help students select appropriate courses for their academic plans.**
Courses which meet the requirements for the Program of Liberal Studies are an excellent way in which first year students are exposed to a variety of academic disciplines. Encouraging students to meet as many of these requirements as they can in the first two

years will provide them both with a strong liberal arts foundation and an introduction to breadth of academic study.

- **Monitor students' academic progress.**

Mid-semester progress grades may provide a warning for students experiencing some difficulties. In some cases, the problem may lie with poor attendance and failure to complete assignments. In other cases, the assistance of a tutor in the Writing Center or the Quantitative Skills Center may provide the intervention needed to reverse a poor start.

Please also provide feedback to those students who are doing well; it's important for students to know why they are succeeding and how they can continue to improve. Providing a "kudos" to a thriving student is just as important to a student's success as providing support to student that may be struggling.

- **Encourage students to get involved in campus activities.**

Students who are involved in co- and extra-curricular activities are more likely to establish a sense of connectedness to Clark and are, therefore, more likely to stay.

- **Refer students to campus resources when appropriate.**

Recognize when an advisee needs the assistance of another professional on campus. Facilitating the connection between your advisee and an appropriate campus resource is an important role that advisors can play.

- **Recognize that you are not alone in this endeavor.**

You have the support of the Division of Student Success staff who add to the advising experience; professional expertise in the areas of academic advising, student accessibility services, counseling services, academic coaching, First Year Success Advising, study abroad, peer tutoring, and writing assistance. Making use of these colleagues will enhance the advising you will provide.

Advising Conversations in the First Semester with First-year Advisees

In order to be able to establish a relationship with your advisees, it is important for them to have the opportunity to meet with you with some regularity. There is no more important time in which to do this than in the student's first semester at Clark. Research has shown that a critical variable in a student's decision to remain at an institution is the opportunity for the student to have a meaningful connection with faculty. The advising relationship offers that opportunity.

All first-year students are paired with a First Year Success Advisor (FYSA) as well as their FYI faculty advisor. This partnership allows for every first-year student to receive academic guidance from both their FYI faculty advisor as well as their FYSA. The FYSA team excels at providing a holistic approach to advising their students based on the entire Clark experience, both academic and social.

In the first semester, advisors are urged to have contact with their advisees at least four times according to the following schedule:

August: The First Semester

Your first meeting with advisees for most advisors will be when you meet them in your First-year Intensive course. While students will have already registered for their fall courses when they meet with you, some will still need to discuss their course selection. Some will need to make changes in their schedule during the add/drop period. In your first meeting, you may wish to explain how you envision your role as advisor and how students may access you for help. You will also want to talk about some of the unique academic opportunities available to students at Clark.

Prior to meeting with your advisees, you will be able to access advising data for each of your advisees through Clark's CRM- Slate. You will be provided with a profile of each of your advisees, copies of their admission applications and essays, results of standardized tests, placement results, and indications of their intended majors and special interests.

September/October: Group Meeting

While you will have regular contact with your advisees in your FYI, the purpose of this meeting is to provide an opportunity for students to discuss their early experience at Clark, both academic and social. Students may find that taking four classes per week is deceptive. They need to understand their responsibility to attend to academics, and may not realize that they should be spending two to three hours studying outside of class for every hour in class. Encourage your advisees to make use of the academic support services that are available to them. These include the Academic Support Center, the reference staff in Goddard Library, and the services of the Division of Student Success.

If you discover that morale in the group is low, check with students who may not have spoken to see if they share the experiences being discussed. Tell students that you will convey their concerns to the proper people on campus. Please report concerns you may have which relate to student life to the Dean of Students. Do not assume that you need to have answers for students' criticism. Let them know that we are interested in their concerns and that the appropriate person will follow up on them.

November: Mid-Semester Progress Review and Course Selection for Spring Semester

Mid-term progress grades may provide a reality check for some students. An individual meeting with advisees to discuss any unsatisfactory grades may provide the impetus to get students back on the right academic track. You may need to engage in triage for some students. It may be preferable for some to withdraw from a course they are failing in order to devote their energies to improving their remaining classes.

Since many students will not have received a formal progress grade, you should consider asking pointed questions about their academic experience:

Is the course work different from what they had expected?

How do their classes compare with one another?

Do they find the material they're covering interesting?

How does each of the courses they are taking fit into their educational plans?

Are they keeping up with all of their readings, assignments, and labs?

How much time do they spend out of class each week doing school work?

Are they managing their time well?

How is their non-academic life going?

Students will select their courses for the spring semester in this month as well. A discussion of how classes are going as the first semester is coming to an end is important. If they plan to take a course that has a prerequisite, they need to understand that they must successfully complete that course in the fall semester before continuing onto the next level.

For some of your advisees, the Thanksgiving break will be their first return home since arriving at Clark in August. Addressing with them some of the issues they may face can be helpful. There will be some adjustment they will need to make after having been independent for three months. There likely will be comparisons made with their friends about the college experience.

Are they, for the most part, pleased with their decision to come to Clark?

Have they been challenged academically?

Do the courses they are taking begin to help clarify some of their goals?

December: End-of-Semester Assessment

It would be helpful to have some contact with your advisees before the semester ends. This may be a conversation in your office or contact over e-mail. Review with them strategies for approaching their exams. Discuss plans for the spring semester. Where appropriate, give a verbal reward for completing the first stage of their university experience.

Do they feel a part of the Clark community?

Recommended Advising Conversations in the Second Semester

January: Opening of Semester Meeting or Contact

This is an opportunity to discuss with the student second semester plans and to review first semester grades. Any changes in the student's schedule may also be discussed at this point. If not a personal meeting, consider dropping an e-mail message to your advisee.

Early April: Mid-Semester Review/Course Selection for the Fall Term

Individual meetings with your advisees at this point in the semester will give you the opportunity to review with them their academic progress. This can be a particularly stressful time for some students and they will benefit from an honest discussion with you.

How are students performing in specific classes?

If appropriate, offer suggestions for academic or personal support services on campus.

This meeting is also be an excellent time to have your first-year advisees reflect on the expectations they identified in the advisor information sheet they completed over the summer. Raising the questions from the form at your meeting would be a good spring board for discussion. Advising for course selection for the fall takes place in early April.

Would your advisees respond differently now to the questions they answered last summer?

Late April/Early May: End-of-Year Assessment

A final meeting with your advisees at the end of the academic year will allow them to reflect on the year. This may be an individual meeting in your office, a contact through e-mail, or a group meeting with your first-year advisees.

Were their expectations for Clark met?

How have their expectations changed?

What are their plans for next year?

Limitations on an Advisor's Responsibility

1. You can't make decisions for your advisees, but you can be a sympathetic listener and offer alternatives.
2. You can't increase the given ability of an advisee but you can encourage the maximum use of that ability or the evaluation of those abilities to determine his/her limitations (i.e. testing).
3. You can't reduce the academic workload of a struggling student but you can recommend a referral to an appropriate office (e.g. Student Concern Alert Form, Academic Advising Center, Division of Student Success).
4. Do not attempt to handle situations when the student's behavior or problems fall outside what could reasonably be judged "normal". Do make appropriate referrals for complex problems involving issues of emotional or physical health, finance, or career planning.
5. Don't "fake it" if you do not have information, but admit your limitations. Find out what is needed or refer the student to the appropriate office.
6. Never betray a student's confidence on confidential issues (including discussing the student's academic performance with parents or guardians). You must either obtain permission from the student for any discussion with a parent or guardian, or the parent must have filed a privacy release statement if the student is a financial dependent (FERPA release).
7. Relax...

Who, When, Why

Advisees can raise the full spectrum of issues with their advisors. Not every problem requires a referral to a "specialist." How can an advisor determine who should be referred?

Listen to What Your Advisee is Really Trying to Tell You...

"Active" listening techniques are most effective.

1. Listen to the tone used, as well as the "words."
2. Before responding, check first to see if you have "heard" what your advisee wanted to say by paraphrasing what was just said (e.g. "Let me see if I understand, you are feeling...").
3. Ask what the student has done or considered doing up to that point.
4. Once you have some feedback, you are in a better position to judge the issue and help.

How "Normal" Is the Issue Your Advisee is Presenting to You?

If it sounds like a "normal" student concern, most often an advisee just needs to "hear" that the experience is pretty typical for a college student. Don't devalue the experience for the student; just offer some assurance that they are not alone.

Some problems, no matter how normal, can still be experienced as a crisis (e.g. flunking one's first exam; wanting to transfer to anywhere else; parents' divorcing). This does call for some understanding but may not require a referral.

Refer Students Who:

- have presented problems for which you do not have the right answers.
- have presented serious problems which are outside your area of expertise (personal, psychological, financial, social).
- have acted in a manner which is seriously disturbing to you.

How to Refer

1. Listen

Use active listening techniques.

Make sure you have understood exactly what the student sees as the problem.

2. Ask

If you are not sure that you understand the problem, ask for clarification.

What has the student tried so far or thought of themselves?

Who has the student discussed this with?

3. Determine

Is this an on campus issue or an off-campus issue?

If a personal problem, is it a "normal" issue the student is having a problem dealing with or does it seem to be a serious psychological problem?

Does the student want an off-campus referral?

How does the student feel about going to a "professional" source for help? Be supportive of students and their desire to do it on their own but encourage the use of resources that are available.

4. Recommend

A referral is always a recommendation, never a directive.

Students should be urged to contact the referral source right away. Having the student call from your office to schedule an appointment is an excellent idea. *If you are concerned about the psychological well-being of an advisee, please contact the Division of Student Success Office immediately with your concern or complete a Student Concern Alert Form. In cases of emergency, please contact University Police.*

5. Follow Up

At your next appointment, check out how effective your referral was and whether an alternative is called for.