



teaching learning committee  
Montana State University Bozeman

**Academic Advising**

Mary Noll & Diane Donnelly  
General Studies Program  
Montana State University-Bozeman

Academic advising has the potential to strongly influence the retention and development of university students. Through regular interactions with students, advisors can gain meaningful information about students' academic and personal experiences, abilities and needs. These insights can be used to help students successfully connect to their academic community and develop appropriate academic and career goals, while fostering an appreciation of life-long learning. Students place a great deal of trust in their advisors. That trust warrants that students receive dependable, accurate, respectful, honest and professional advice.

**Academic Advising: A Definition**

*Advising is a dynamic process for obtaining the critical information students need to make the most important decisions about college; decisions affecting academic majors, career goals, elective courses, secondary fields of study, and co-curricular activities and life planning. Advising is an integral part of teaching; it is the opportunity to encourage students to engage in a systematic, strategic planning process and to take responsibility for their personal and professional development. The strength of academic advising lies in the commitment of faculty and professional advisors to serve as mentors, to be accessible, and to be a source of information and encouragement in the advising process. Academic intellectual and developmental needs of the students are considered (Crockett, 1985).*

There probably are as many definitions of academic advising as there are advisors. Some advisors are comfortable addressing, or at least acknowledging, the broad range of events in students' lives that may impact their academic performance, while others may prefer their interactions be strictly focused on academic goals and requirements. Certainly an advisor's responsibility includes an interest in student needs, availability, knowledge of university policies, procedures and requirements, academic requirements and opportunities in the curriculum, the

career connections of the discipline and current information on referral resources available to students.

The student component must include taking responsibility for one's own learning and goals, keeping track of curriculum requirements and initiating contacts with advisors or other appropriate members of the academic community. Students must make and keep appointments and come prepared to advising conferences.

### **Statement of Purpose and Goals for Academic Advising**

The primary purpose of an academic advising program is to assist students in the development of meaningful educational plans that are compatible with their life goals.

Goals for academic advising should include:

- Development of suitable educational plans
- Clarification of career and life goals
- Selection of appropriate courses and other educational experiences
- Interpretation of institutional requirements
- Enhancement of student awareness about educational resources available (e.g., internships, study abroad, honors, and learning assistance programs)
- Evaluation of student progress toward established goals
- Development of decision making skills
- Reinforcement of student self direction
- Referral to and use of institutional and community support services
- Collection and distribution of data regarding student needs, preferences, and performance for use in making institutional decisions and policy  
(White, 2000)

### **Academic Advising Needs of Different Student Populations**

#### **Entering First Year Students**

- Period of great transition and adjustment; most critical phases of college student advising
- First six weeks are critical in terms of academic and social integration
- Need help formulating educational and career goals
- Important to become familiar with university resources, policies and procedures

Ways to help freshmen students:

- Inform students of advisor's name, office location and hours, email, etc.
- Orient students to degree program and related careers
- Inform students of related career opportunities
- Inform students of university and curriculum deadlines
- Inform students of pertinent campus resources

### **Sophomores**

- Encourage student engagement, interest and excitement about the learning process and areas of study
- Concerns about changing majors, school, "stopping out," or dropping out
- New transfer students often arrive on campus

### **Juniors**

- Less concern with schedule planning and procedures
- Need information on activities, internships, etc; how to integrate theoretical and practical competencies
- Eager to integrate academic plans with career plans
- Need help in establishing and visualizing career/occupational goals
- May need to reevaluate major choice

### **Ways to help continuing students:**

- Assist students in assessing core curriculum progress
- Assist students in assessing degree program progress
- Discuss curricular enrichment - minors, exchange programs
- Advise students of catalog declaration, upper division credits, total credits required for graduation, GPA requirements
- Inform students of professional organizations, campus organizations, internship opportunities

### **Seniors**

- Capstone year – integrates intellectual and social experiences
- Graduation audit
- Provide resources on resume writing, interviewing, job searching
- Prepare for transition to "real world"
- Solicit professional references

### Ways to help seniors:

- Review requirements for graduation (core, graduation application, degree program and upper division requirements)
- Discuss career direction
- Inform students of job opportunities (campus recruiting, interviewing skills, resume development)
- If relevant, discuss and make preparations for graduate school

### **Advising Considerations, Legalities, Ethics**

#### It is your responsibility to...

1. Be available for and to become good at advising
2. Be properly informed: look it up, ask, keep current
3. Refer rather than counsel
4. Keep good records of all exchanges with each student in an active file
5. Keep your door open, keep "at arms length," and abide by intellectual property, consensual relationship and other laws and policies
6. Maintain confidentiality for all records and communications (unless it is of an emergency nature and then notify appropriate authorities)

### **General Academic Advising Resources**

National Academic Advising Association: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/>

This site features a wide range of information applicable to academic advising, as well as links to numerous sites.

Academic Advising: A Comprehensive Handbook by Virginia Gordon, Wesley Habley & Associates, 2000, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. (Available in the MSU-Bozeman Library)

### **Advising Tips Based on Experience!**

- Create an advising document file to keep track of your individual advisees. Include their name, ID number, email address, and other pertinent info helpful to you. Each time you meet with them, add date and comments from that meeting. Excellent reference to refresh your memory before meeting with advisees and also provides documentation of advising if needed.

- If doing general advising in your department, jot down notes during and/or after meeting with a student and include in their paper file. This allows other faculty and staff to access your comments.
- Create an e-mail list of advisees and send out messages regarding important deadlines or new information of interest to your students. Ask students for the email address they regularly use; this may not be their Montana.edu address.

## **References**

Crockett, D. S. (1985). Academic advising. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, D. Saluri & Associates, *Increasing student retention: Effective programs and practices for reducing the drop out rate*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

*The university advising plan: A comprehensive, collaborative model*. (1998).  
Montana State University, Bozeman, MT.

White, E. R. Developing Mission, Goals and Objectives for the Advising Program.  
In Gordon, V. N., Habley, W. R. & Associates. (2000). *Academic advising: A comprehensive handbook*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass