

The Role of the Advisor

Academic advising is a valuable resource to a student pursuing an undergraduate degree and is an integral part of a student's experience at college. Because of the importance of correct and responsible scheduling, advising becomes a collaborative effort between you, the advisor, and the student. As an advisor, you should provide appropriate guidelines for students, but you should not make decisions for them. Your job is to serve as a guide by helping students identify and access scheduling alternatives, as well as potential consequences of decisions.

As an advisor, you perform several distinct roles: you help students understand the purpose of a university education; you relate the rigors and expectations of the student's declared major; and you initiate the planning necessary for the student's academic and career paths. You cannot increase a student's ability, but you can encourage the maximum utilization of that ability. Nor can you relieve personal, financial, family, employment, or academic responsibilities held by a student, but you can refer and recommend appropriate solutions to address student needs. Moreover, you are not expected to serve as a psychological counselor, and thus, are not expected to deal with emotional problems that fall outside the range of normal student behavior.

Keys to Effective Advising

- ◆ Be accessible during posted office hours.
- ◆ Provide a means through which students can schedule appointments.
- ◆ Understand curriculum, graduation requirements, and university policies.
- ◆ Discuss with students the specific university and departmental requirements, procedures and deadlines.
- ◆ Help students define and develop obtainable goals, and discuss academic preparation and career opportunities.
- ◆ Assist students in planning programs of study (both short-term and long-term) that are consistent with their abilities and interests.
- ◆ Discuss course load, considering student's academic background, program demands, employment, and/or personal commitments, etc.
- ◆ Help students identify special needs and direct them to the appropriate places where those needs are addressed.
- ◆ Monitor student's progress towards program and keep accurate records of the academic process.
- ◆ Help students assume responsibility for their decisions and actions.

Communication Skills for Effective Advising

- ◆ Explain to your students what you can do to serve them as their advisor.
- ◆ Permit students to make their own informed decisions.
- ◆ Try to communicate to your students that you care about them as individuals.
- ◆ Express interest in your students' life goals as well as their college goals.
- ◆ Try to establish eye contact and avoid nervous or bored gestures.
- ◆ Help students explore obstacles that must be overcome to attain established goals.
- ◆ Try to anticipate your student's needs.
- ◆ Challenge your students to a higher academic performance.
- ◆ Ask questions using "what" or "how" to encourage your students to respond with more than "yes," "no," or "I don't know" answers.
- ◆ Ask your students continuing or clarifying questions.
- ◆ Don't interrupt your student in mid-sentence; instead, allow your student to complete his/her statement.
- ◆ Remember to not be critical of other faculty, staff, and/or other programs of study.
- ◆ When in doubt, call an appropriate office or department. Telling a student "I don't know, but I will help you find out" is much more appealing than telling a student that his planned graduation will be delayed.

Legal Considerations

(Schubert and Schubert, 1983; Young, 1984)

Courts recognize the academic freedom which protects academic decisions, including advising decisions. However, courts will intercede if a decision is clearly arbitrary or if students are denied their protective rights. Courts have ruled that:

- advising is an implied contract between a student and an institution.
- terms prescribed by the institution for graduation are binding.
- additional requirements may not be placed upon a student after the student completes those requirements that were outlined for the student by proper officials.

Catalogues, bulletins, and handbooks of an institution constitute a contractual relationship between the student and the institution. With this relationship, obligations are placed on both parties

and the contract could be judicially enforced. Therefore, emphasis is placed on the quality of advising to enhance retention, which results in additional responsibilities assigned to you, the advisor.

You serve as the university's representative. Moreover, the student has the right to rely upon information you provide. You should make informed suggestions based on knowledge and experience, and you should provide recommendations from the written publications from the university. You provide information so that a student can make informed decisions, but the publications that list the rules and regulations of the university constitute the terms of the contract between the student and the university. Your responsibility is to advise, and the final decision lies with the student.

When working with a student to develop a program that meets his needs and satisfies degree requirements, you must ensure that there is no deceit, no fraud, and no misrepresentation in the information provided.

In general, you will not be personally liable for an advising error unless there is evidence of negligence, irresponsible behavior, or arbitrary treatment of a student. A good suggestion would be to maintain accurate advising records in order to protect against claims of incorrect advising.

The Family Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)

At The University of Mississippi, the educational records of all students are protected by the Family Rights and Privacy Act. This Act protects the privacy of educational records, guarantees the rights of students to review their educational records, and provides guidelines for the correction of inaccurate or misleading data through formal or informal hearings.

Because a student-advising file is considered part of an official academic record, the advisor must, upon request, allow a student to view his/her file. Personal notes by the advisor made during advising sessions may be excluded. You may allow a colleague who will temporarily perform advising duties for a student to see your personal notes related to that student; however, all personal notes from a student's advising file should be removed in cases where advisor and/or major are changed.

In addition, directory information, which includes name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, major, athletic activities, attendance, and degrees and awards received, is not subject to confidentiality restrictions unless a student has refused to have such information distributed by the university. If a student has not restricted such information, then you may share directory information with parents, employers, or other third parties.

Students own the right to their academic information. Their information cannot be shared with others (including parents) unless the student formally allows for that information to be shared. In those cases, students can sign the Buckley Amendment Waiver Form. Copies of this form are available at the Academic Support Center or in the Dean's Office of the College or School (e.g., Liberal Arts, Business, etc.) in which the student is enrolled.