

# Academic Advisors: Providing Student Support and Advocacy

**A**cademic advisors are often underutilized on college campuses. Yes, students get them to sign off on their course load prior to class registration. But, if that's the only time they see them, big deal! Those students who get to really know their academic advisors gain an advocate – and often glean more from them than just class advice.

## What is an academic advisor?

Academic advisors are professionals who are dedicated to helping students. Each year of college brings new challenges, whether it's transitioning from high school or community college, trying to decide whether or not to study abroad, declaring a major, deciding on a senior thesis topic, or determining what to do after graduation. Academic advisors can help students stay on track. They can answer questions about courses, program requirements, and academic policies and procedures. They can also refer students to other support services on campus.

Generally, students are assigned an advisor upon their arrival on campus. Once they declare a major, they may be assigned a new advisor or get to select their own. It's important to remember that many academic advisors are also faculty members. In addition

## A Front Line Support System

Academic advisors often become a strong support system for students. While they sometimes need to refer students to a more appropriate resource on campus, they can serve “on the front lines” in times of crisis or struggle. These are many topics discussed among academic advisors and students including:

- declaring or changing a major
- selecting a minor / correlate
- handling a conflict with a professor
- handling family or personal issues (such as a death in the family, a learning disability, or psychological concern)
- deciding to transfer to another institution or take a leave of absence
- exploring post-graduation plans such as graduate school or entering the work force

to serving as advisors for students, they teach classes, conduct research, and serve on college committees.

Working successfully with an advisor requires some flexibility on the student's part. Most academic advisors have posted office hours when they are certain to be available. Many times, however, academic advisors are willing to schedule meetings at other times— especially if a student needs immediate help.

Students should never be afraid to ask their advisor for help. When trying to get in touch with an advisor, it's always best for students to leave a voicemail or send an email to schedule a time to chat. This ensures that students will have the advisor's full attention.

## What should students expect from an academic advisor?

- a prompt response to inquiries and requests for help (Students often forget that professionals aren't on their email 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Generally, it's reasonable to expect a response to an email or voicemail within 48 hours.)
- help with identifying educational interests or career goals
- assistance in selecting courses that will maximize learning and meet degree requirements
- advice on the pros and cons of studying abroad
- answers to academic questions
- an effort to connect students with helpful faculty across campus
- respectful and appropriate interactions and exchanges

## What can academic advisors expect from students?

- to respond promptly to emails and voicemails, particularly requests to schedule meetings to take care of registration or other academic-related processes
- to come prepared (and on time) for meetings with all necessary paperwork
- to become familiar with general academic requirements and policies
- to consult on changes in a class schedule or degree program and when experiencing academic difficulty