

Use of Academic Advising Notes: Purpose and Guidelines

Purpose of Advising Notes

Notes that document advising services are a key element in a comprehensive, quality advising program. Advising notes serve several purposes including:

- Providing a history of student progress for advisors and other staff who work with students.
- Documenting student interaction with the advising system.
- Providing Information that will aid advisors in helping the student on their degree or career path. Degree routes may include significant detours like a medical leave of absence, military service, transfer or even suspension. Good notes help support the transitions of leaving or returning.
- Providing a roadmap of students' educational endeavors.
- Documenting advisor recommendations and rationale.

FERPA Considerations

Information maintained about a student, including advising notes, are part of the students' educational record and are therefore, governed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). According to FERPA, students have a right to inspect and review their educational records. This means, that a student could request to review information contained in advising notes. For this reason, advisors should utilize advising notes in a manner consistent with their stated purpose.

Guidelines to Help Determine What to Record

- 1. Include notes that will help the student; others can then reinforce.**

"Reminded student to submit official transcript from prior college asap"

"Discussed importance of repeating CPT 101 and ENG 101 in spring semester"

- 2. Include notes that will help future advisors understand the student or the recommendations that you gave.**

"Explained general education courses and special requirements for Health Science students"

"Student intends to go Savannah Tech to study Dental Hygiene. Is only taking prerequisite courses at TCL to get admitted there"

3. Include possible consequences of not following recommendations given.

“Discussed need to take BIO 112 during spring semester so BIO 210 can be taken in fall in order to be eligible to apply for the nursing program”

“Student wants to enroll in 18 credit hours. Cautioned regarding heavy academic load”

“Reviewed course sequencing and discussed if ABC 123 is not taken in Fall 2015, it will not be offered again until Summer 2016”

4. Include comments that may help you in future interactions with student (e.g., perhaps with providing letters of recommendations or support for scholarship applications)

“Student was well prepared for advising session. Had tentative schedule already worked out”

5. Exclude your subjective judgments about the student, especially when they are negative.

Do Not Write:

“Student is not motivated to succeed in classes this semester”

Better to Write:

“Student reports that he is struggling this semester due to frequent absences”

6. Exclude referrals of a sensitive or personal nature.

Do Not Write:

“Student was referred to on-campus mental health counselor”

Better to Write:

“Made student aware of campus resources available to students”

7. Exclude personal concerns of the student.

Do Not Write:

“Sister has cancer, student is having a difficult time staying focused on academics”

Better to Write:

“Student experiencing difficulty focusing because of circumstances outside of education”

Additional Topics to Include in Advising Notes:

- Describe when and why exceptions have been made; note if a form documenting/approving such exceptions and overrides has been filed.
- Document any advising provided based on submission of an unofficial transcript.
- Include recommendations discussed with the student and their reaction to recommendations.
- Provide information that will help colleagues understand the student's situation as well as recommendations given.
- Document courses that were recommended for registration in the current and any future semesters. This information can assist others working with the same student with registration.
- When professional judgement suggests that you provide an analysis of a situation that goes beyond simply reporting facts and details, comments should be well grounded in facts and reflection. Focus on observation and reaction rather than accusation. For example:

Do Not Write:

"Student was a bully and rude in our meeting"

Better to Write:

"The student spoke in an angry tone that made me very uncomfortable"

Do Not Write:

"This student is demanding and unreasonable – accused me of not wanting to help her"

Better to Write:

"I provided student with written information on campus based resources that she could utilize, however, she expressed frustration that no one at TCL wants to help her and ended our meeting"

Do Not Write:

This student is a loose cannon and doesn't belong in college"

Better to Write:

"The student had a difficult time controlling his emotions during our meeting"