

**UNIVERSITY SENATE**  
**UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY**  
**STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**

Introduced by: Undergraduate Academic Council

Date: November 21, 2005

**POLICIES AND PRACTICES CONCERNING  
UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTORING**

IT IS HEREBY PROPOSED THAT THE FOLLOWING BE ADOPTED:

1. That the attached “Proposed Policy on Academic Advising” be adopted as University policy and that the philosophy and definition of advising and mentoring contained therein be endorsed by the University.
2. That these policies be forwarded to the President for approval.

**Rationale:**

In 2004, an ad hoc Task Force on Academic Advisement was formed in consultation with the Undergraduate Academic Council to develop a framework for academic advising at the undergraduate level – a University-wide shared understanding of, and vision for, academic advising that reflects the many practices of academic advising across the University. The Task Force’s goal was to inventory current practice; to formulate a coherent set of policies that emerged from that practice where possible, i.e., to make explicit what has been implicit, or develop recommendations where practices vary; and to identify ways to improve the experience for advisors and advisees.

The Task Force met weekly from July through October and made its initial report to the Undergraduate Academic Council in November 2004 and offered a draft policy statement. The Task Force report also included a series of areas for improvement in practice that its members continue to work on, in consultation with the UAC.

The Task Force recognized a major impediment to effective academic advising is the scarcity, or perceived scarcity, of seats in many courses. Limited course availability often makes building a schedule a difficult task; it prevents students from enrolling in courses discussed with advisors; and finding an open course that “fits” and meets the students’ requirements consumes much “advising” time that could be spent more productively on other matters. The Task Force concluded, however, that resolving the issue of course availability would require a far more extensive examination than it was able to provide. The Task Force raised the issue to UAC to encourage faculty and administration to explore ways to address this characteristic of the undergraduate experience at Albany.

The Council has carefully reviewed both the report and recommendations of the Task Force and has solicited and considered faculty feedback concerning that document. The following policy on academic advising codifies and clarifies many extant practices. Particularly in view of current concerns about student satisfaction, course availability, and retention and graduation rates, the UAC asserts that these recommendations are timely and important.

The policy has also been modified in response to comments offered by the University Planning and Priorities Committee. A joint committee, composed of members of UAC, UPC, and task force members, met during the summer to review and revise this proposal to respond to both policy and resource and implementation questions.

**I. POLICY**

**A. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Academic advising at the University at Albany represents a vital component of the undergraduate program that encourages a student's active engagement in his/her education, supports his/her development as a self-directed learner and independent decision maker, and promotes participation as a member of the University's learning community.

The principal objectives of academic advising are to provide guidance to the student that promotes: 1) intellectual development and engagement; 2) awareness of the range of academic and co-curricular opportunities available; 3) understanding of the requirements and development of a plan to complete a degree; 4) development of self-direction and independent decision making; and 5) awareness of post-graduation careers and opportunities appropriate to the degree.

Academic advisement is mandatory for students each semester in order to register. Before providing access to course registration to a student, each academic advisement unit must ensure that it has met its responsibility to provide advisement to the student as outlined below.

**B. RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Each academic department has responsibility for advising students with declared majors in their disciplines. This responsibility includes ensuring that each student understands the courses in the major as well as sequencing, grade point average, and special circumstances that comprise requirements for successful completion of the major; and requirements of the minor and General Education, as well as overall graduation requirements. Each department must also ensure a student is apprised regularly of his/her progress in meeting these requirements. Toward these ends, academic departments must develop routine and effective procedures for monitoring a student's progress through the degree program and create contexts in which this information is communicated so that a student has time and opportunity to make the best decisions about how to satisfy the technical requirements for completing the degree.

The Advisement Services Center and the Educational Opportunity Program (for academic advising of EOP students) have the primary responsibility for the advising of students prior to declaration of a major. This responsibility includes developing effective methods for supporting a student's transition into the University at Albany, and his/her growth and development as a self-directed learner and independent decision maker, as well as providing information about University requirements, including General Education, major, and minor. Further, this responsibility includes assistance with major and career exploration, information about various major options, information about enrichment opportunities within the University, use of the University tools and resources that support academic progress, and remediation or special assistance. These units also bear responsibility for ensuring students' progress toward one or more majors and minors and for creating contexts in which information is communicated so that a student has time and opportunity to make the best decisions about his/her educational program. These units are also responsible for facilitating contacts of advisees with faculty and other department-based resources as appropriate to the student.

The University community as a whole has responsibility for ensuring that academic advising is provided as a coherent continuum of services that supports and facilitates a student's progress through the various stages of the academic program, and his/her development as a self-directed learner and independent decision maker.

The Undergraduate Academic Council is the governance body with oversight responsibility for policies related to academic advising. School/college deans and academic administrators are responsible for ensuring compliance with these policies.

**C. STRUCTURE OF ACADEMIC ADVISING AND MENTORING**

In fulfilling the responsibility to provide academic advising to students, a department may establish structures and procedures and strategies that best fit its resources and curriculum, while accommodating the needs of all advisees. Each department will provide academic advising of new students, both freshmen and transfers, during scheduled planning conferences, as required.

Every department will provide the opportunity for contact with an advisor for every student each semester and will include opportunity for the following:

**Academic Advising**

- Discussing each student's academic plan and goals
- Using the University's Degree Audit, reviewing the student's progress toward degree, including major, minor, and general education requirements
- Reviewing semester course selection, including evaluating whether courseload and course choices are appropriate for the student for each given semester
- Reviewing the student's overall plan for future semesters, especially for programs with specific timetables, and plans for summer study at UAlbany or elsewhere
- Reviewing plans for improving academic success for students on academic and terminal probation.
- Reviewing, discussing and signing off on Academic Improvement Form as necessary
- Advising the student on coordinating general education, minor, unrestricted elective courses and extracurricular activity choices with the major, career, lifelong satisfaction and other interests as appropriate

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**2Academic Mentoring**

Beyond technical administration of the major, academic departments also bear responsibility for addressing the needs of students for growth and development, i.e., for mentoring and career advice, such as special research and learning opportunities, honors programs and accelerated degree options; independent study, interdisciplinary opportunities, professional academic or artistic organization chapters or career clubs, research, internship, study abroad options, and career or graduate school options, and for participating in the community of learners; for recognizing demonstrated potential for honors, national scholarship competition and other relevant special opportunities and giving or referring the student to mentoring for them as appropriate; and for remediation or special assistance.

While advising and mentorship are provided by both academic professionals and teaching faculty, and can occur in many different settings, academic mentorship is a special responsibility of the teaching faculty.

**Advising in General Education**

The University's General Education program has been established as a four-year experience required of all students (including transfer students). It is the responsibility of all advisors to have basic knowledge of the General Education program structure and requirements and to ensure that advisees are making progress in completing requirements.

Responsibility to advise freshmen and other pre-majors in the purpose, structure, requirements, and options for General Education rests with advisors in the Advisement Services Center and Educational Opportunity Program and should occur early in a student's University career. For declared majors, including transfer students, academic departments will provide ongoing monitoring of progress toward meeting General Education requirements using the Degree Audit Report. Substantive questions regarding course equivalents for General Education and access to General Education courses are the shared responsibility of the Office of Undergraduate Studies and the department in the disciplinary area of the course.

**Advising in Minor or Second Major**

University policy requires that all students have a minor or second major (except students in combined major-minor or similar programs). Responsibility for advising regarding the minor or second major is as follows: 1) the primary department has responsibility to provide basic information about the requirements for a minor or second major, and for ensuring that students make progress in completing these requirements; and 2) the department offering the minor or second major has responsibility to address substantive questions regarding course content, sequencing, etc., as well as providing access to courses.

**Assessment**

For the purpose of improving academic advising, University-wide surveys of the student experience should measure student satisfaction with academic advising and report to the University community via the deans and governance bodies. In addition, each department or unit should make provision to measure student satisfaction with advising in connection with the academic program review for the purpose of improvement.

**Recognition and Reward**

Participation in academic advising and mentoring activities by faculty and professional staff must be recognized and rewarded by the University and by the academic and administrative units to the greatest degree possible. In addition to the number of students advised, the University Faculty Activity Report shall include, in the section for Teaching, a line item for a narrative report of Advising and Mentoring Activities.

Departments are also expected to include information on individual faculty advising activity as part of the review processes for renewal, promotion and continuing appointment, discretionary increases and appropriate departmental, college and University recognitions and awards.

**D. STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACADEMIC ADVISING**

Each student is expected to be an active participant in academic advising, just as he/she is expected to be an active participant in his/her education. While it is the responsibility of the department to ensure that students receive accurate and timely assistance in choosing courses and in developing and implementing an academic plan, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to ensure that he/she understands and is actively engaged in monitoring his/her academic progress in order to plan, undertake and qualify in a program of study in order to graduate under the academic regulations of the University.

Early in the academic career, a student is expected to focus on becoming acquainted with the requirements of the academic program, including policies and procedures, and to master the tools that support active participation in his/her academic progress (including the use of the Undergraduate Bulletin, the degree audit, and the student registration system).

As a student advances through the academic program, he/she is expected to assume responsibility for acquiring the information needed to complete the degree requirements, and for preparing for academic advising sessions by reviewing the degree audit, formulating questions, and developing preliminary plans for the semester and beyond. Additionally, each student is expected to follow up on referrals made by advisors. A student experiencing academic difficulty is expected to meet with his/her academic advisor to discuss the details of a plan for academic improvement.

A student who transfers from another institution directly into a major must be given early opportunities to become familiar with the policies, procedures, and tools that support their academic progress at the University at Albany.

**E. INFORMATION RESOURCES FOR ADVISORS AND STUDENTS**

**Information Resources for Advisors in Support of Academic Advising**

A dynamic educational environment such as the University at Albany requires that academic advisors have access to a wide range of information resources and tools as well as opportunities to enrich their ability to deliver academic advising. Development and maintenance of these resources to help students and advisors meet their responsibilities will be the responsibility of the Advisement Services Center and the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. To the greatest extent possible, Academic and administrative units are expected to collaborate to develop and share such resources through electronic and paper means.

**Information Resources for Students in Support of Academic Advising**

Similarly, the responsible departments and units shall provide for their advisees the necessary information resources and tools to support their academic participation in their academic advising. The Advisement Services Center will provide resources for entering students.

**F. ONGOING OVERSIGHT**

As the governance body with responsibility for policies related to undergraduate academic advising, the Undergraduate Academic Council and the Provost shall convene an advisory board to monitor University-wide implementation of this policy, to provide feedback and advice to academic departments and other units that deliver advising services, to monitor and verify that the information resources for faculty and students fully support effective advising, to review and encourage assessment for the purposes of improvement, and to further explore and promote methods to improve and enhance advising. The board will provide an annual report to UAC, the Deans, and the Provost regarding the state of advising at the University.

**III. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

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**A. RESOURCES FOR ADVISING**

As this policy codifies and clarifies much extant practices related to academic advising, the resources that each department or advising center currently devotes to academic advising represent a baseline resource investment.

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If academic departments and advisement centers conclude that current resources are not sufficient to meet their obligation to provide effective academic advising, or if they seek additional resources to improve their advising services, existing budgetary mechanisms should be employed. Among the options academic units may consider as they seek to enhance their academic advising resources:

- Encouragement and recognition of teaching faculty involvement in advising as a departmental service or teaching contribution or University service contribution
- Reallocation of resources (e.g., staff and instructional resources) to advising
- Allocation of resources to support stipends for 10-month faculty fulfilling academic advising responsibilities in the summer
- Petition through the School/College resource allocation process for additional advising resources to the department
- Petition through the University's budget allocation process for additional advising resources to the department or School/College

The resources necessary to prepare the University-wide advising information materials will be supplied within the current staff of the Advisement Services Center and the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The Advisement Services Center will also ensure ongoing training opportunities for faculty and staff on elements of the undergraduate program.

Resources in the form of expertise and assistance are also necessary to support the preparation and maintenance of advising information resources in academic departments, both print and electronic. These may be provided by Advisement Services, Undergraduate Studies, CETL and/or ITS.

**B. ONGOING ACTION ITEMS**

It has been suggested that there are structures and policies that increase the demands on academic advising resources. The Advisement Task Force has already begun to address the following issues, and the advisory board described in this policy will be charged to review these as well as other issues it identifies, and develop recommendations to address them:

- Examination of the resources currently devoted to academic advising in academic departments and development of a recommended standard (e.g. ratio of advisees to teaching faculty member, or advisees to full-time professional advisor) and possible incentives
- Alternatives to the traditional face-to-face meeting each semester to achieve the mandatory advising contact policy, including email and phone advising, or possible longer periods between advising contacts (e.g., annual mandatory advising for some students. This would require that course schedules be prepared on an annual, rather than semester, basis.)
- Identification to the General Education Committee of issues that require clarification for departmentally-based advisors

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- Better communication and coordination of advising between ASC/EOP and academic departments and increased involvement of faculty with freshman and pre-major advising, especially in support of earlier identification of appropriate honors options, national and international scholarship competitions, and bachelor's-masters or other accelerated degree options. Exploration of earlier admission to the major, other alternatives to increase student-faculty interaction in the development of the student's academic plan, and alternatives to the "advisement center" model for freshman and pre-major advising.
- In support of improvement of academic advising, development of opportunities for departments to learn from one another and from external sources about various models of advising including the benefits, disadvantages, and costs of these models.
- Development of departmentally-based "Orientation/welcome" programs for new majors
- Methods to address the particular "transition" needs and ongoing issues of transfer students
- Revision of the Undergraduate Bulletin to improve its usefulness as an advising tool
- Preparation and continued enhancement of an advising guide for students and a guide for advisors, and workshops and other means for advisors to learn more information, techniques, and strategies for effective advising.
- Options to provide easier access to courses – especially of General Education courses -- including the widespread use of "permission numbers" that generates student frustration and runaround.
- Examination of institutional processes to eliminate student runaround, including approvals for waivers, substitutions, etc.; improved communication protocols among major and minor departments and administrative and academic departments

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