Guiding Principles for Academic Advising

A vital, though often implicit goal of undergraduate education has always been to instill in students a deepening understanding of the nature, scope, and purpose of their own education, recognizing that personal development and intellectual growth are mutually reinforcing processes. As students master a growing body of information, knowledge, and wisdom in the curriculum and through their immersion in the campus community, advisors act as guides and resources, recognizing that education is, or should be, both a developmental and transformative process.

From our first contacts with incoming undergraduates, throughout their vital first year and beyond, it is often academic advisors who bear the primary responsibility for communicating this wider vision of higher education to our students. At UW-Madison, all undergraduates are assigned to specific advising units and to particular advisors who have the officially delegated responsibility for providing sound, comprehensive academic advising as a fundamental component in each student’s education.

As the role of effective academic advising has emerged as a basic element of our educational mission and our evolving vision of the undergraduate experience, the need to articulate some overarching Guiding Principles for academic advisors and advising units has become increasingly apparent. The following Guiding Principles are intended to provide a broad foundation for advising practice as well as a vision toward which we can strive while doing our part to reinvigorate the undergraduate experience at UW–Madison. These Guiding Principles were created and voted on by the Council on Academic Advising in 2009.

These Guiding Principles are offered with the following provisos:

A. These Guiding Principles are intended primarily for those individuals who serve as the officially assigned academic advisors for undergraduates and for the schools, colleges, and advising units to which they are attached. Beyond this, it is hoped that these Guiding Principles will also resonate for faculty and staff members who work with students in an advising capacity though they might not be their officially assigned academic advisor—colleagues in Admissions, the McBurney Center, International Academic Programs, career services, etc., as well as for other colleagues in academic and student services.

B. These Guiding Principles are not intended to dictate one particular advising model for the campus. Rather, they are articulated with the understanding that different schools, colleges, and advising units will approach these goals and principles differently, employing an array of service models that best fit the needs of their students and their staffing resources. While these advising models will undoubtedly vary—from pairing faculty advisors with professional advisors to offering first-year seminars to innovative uses of student peer advisors, etc.—they all share similar overall objectives.

C. These Guiding Principles are also not intended as a template or checklist for individual advising appointments or programming, recognizing that the focus of particular meetings or advising sessions may focus much more narrowly, depending on their purpose and nature. The changing needs and circumstances of our students will necessitate emphasizing certain goals at different times.

D. In the Advising Guiding Principles, “advisor” refers to anyone who serves in the capacity of the designated academic advisor for undergraduates, though their actual title may vary (advisor, student services coordinator, faculty, assistant dean, classified staff, etc.). While recognizing that the field of academic advising has largely become formalized and professionalized on our campus and across the country, we also need to appreciate that many faculty and staff members who serve in this capacity also have diverse other duties. In this sense, advisor designates a function rather than a job title, that is, anyone who works in an advising capacity with undergraduates.
Guiding Principles for Academic Advising at the University of Wisconsin–Madison

1. As educators, academic advisors support student learning and development, facilitate academic exploration, help students connect their learning to themselves and their world, and share responsibility for campus-wide learning outcomes.

2. From a developmental frame of reference, advisors help students reflect on their educational experiences and engage them in identifying, developing, and realizing their plans, goals, and possible careers.

3. Through careful listening and questioning, advisors create an open, respectful, and supportive environment in which students can explore and consider their experiences, feelings, values, aptitudes, and aspirations.

4. Advisors teach students about degree requirements, institutional policies and procedures, and university structure and culture, and refer them to campus support services.

5. Advisors support student academic success and help students make reasonable and appropriate progress toward degree completion.

6. Advisors promote the values associated with a liberal education; help students identify the knowledge, understanding, and skills they are gaining through their college experience; support the development of students’ critical thinking, integrative, and communication skills; and help link students’ learning and professional preparation to the workplace.

7. In the tradition of the Wisconsin Idea and the Wisconsin Experience, advisors encourage students to participate in out-of-class learning experiences, engage with and serve local and global communities to solve real-world problems, and integrate in-class and out-of-class learning.

8. Advisors encourage students to consider their own cultural backgrounds; to develop intercultural knowledge and respect for differences; and to take action on behalf of justice and equity.

9. Advisors help students become effective decision makers who accept responsibility for their actions and the impact of their choices on their lives and their communities.

10. Advisors foster in students a commitment to life-long learning and the “life of the mind”—and model that commitment in their own work and life.