

First-year advising
in the College of Arts and Sciences:
A brief guide for faculty advisors

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Preface

Who was the first faculty advisor? As an officially recognized title in the institutional organization of American higher education, that of “faculty advisor” is little more than a century old. But as a pattern for a significant relationship between a teacher and a student, academic advising is as old as the hills. In order to better understand what advising is, it may be useful to define our terms. When the Dean of the College solicits nominations for the College’s Paul Advising Awards, the letter reminds departments that: “The Paul Awards are given annually to dedicated undergraduate advisors who make a difference in the lives of the Cornell students they mentor and inspire.” A faculty advisor is a teacher who “mentors and inspires,” and who “makes a difference” in the life of an undergraduate.

Using that as a definition, we find faculty advisors almost everywhere we look. An early example is the character who gave his name to one of the qualities of a faculty advisor: Mentor, the man Odysseus left in charge in Ithaca when the Greeks sailed off toward Troy, and the man who mentored Telemachus through his fatherless years. You will recall that when Athena, the goddess of wisdom, wishes to “mentor and inspire” Telemachus she does so by, in Robert Fitzgerald’s translation, “putting on Mentor’s figure and his tone, / the warm voice in a lucid flight of words.” It is worth pausing over those lines, especially the warm voice and its lucid flight of words. Homer has captured here something of the essence of the advising relationship. The successful advising relationship combines the warmth of an emotional attachment with the lucidity of genuine intellectual engagement.

Advising is an often very difficult task. Advising is not a component of most graduate educations. Graduate students will, of course, learn their fields very well; if they are fortunate, they also will be given the opportunity to be trained as teachers in those fields. Advising, however, is something that most often is learned as one does it. Mentor, in the episode from The Odyssey quoted above, had the advantage of having his role filled by the goddess of wisdom. Most advisors aren’t so lucky. They must acquire wisdom through practice, and it can be an arduous practice.

Advisors in the College of Arts and Sciences typically have advising cohorts of at least ten students in addition to their teaching responsibilities, other departmental and college administrative responsibilities, and the responsibilities they carry toward their scholarly professions. More and more we find that students come to advisors for a greater range of advice than simply planning courses for the coming semester (though that in itself can be a challenge). Faculty advisors are often the first, and for many the only, adult contact for students arriving on campus in the fall of their freshman year. Those early advising appointments can be times of emotional stress as students adjust to being away from home, to being away from the comfort they felt with their high school guidance offices, to being in the first really challenging courses they’ve faced in

their lives, to being in dormitories filled with energetic, supremely intelligent and diverse groups of other students from far-flung backgrounds.

It is a remarkable fact of the College of Arts and Sciences that, despite the fullness of their professional obligations as teachers and scholars, so many of our faculty are gifted and successful advisors. One objective measure of the success of the college advising structure is graduation rates and our college has one of the highest in the nation. While not all of our students will be as fortunate as Telemachus to have the goddess of wisdom impersonating their faculty advisors, the College of Arts and Sciences is graced with faculty particularly skilled at the challenging task of mentoring and inspiring the gifted young people who are our students.

David DeVries
Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education

Introduction

Thank you for performing the valuable service of advising first-year students in the College. The following pages serve as a brief guide to first-year advising and supplement the faculty advising orientation.

If you have questions or need help, please call me or any of the other advising deans in the advising office: 255-5004 (for first-year students and sophomores) or 255-4833 (for juniors and seniors)

Peggy Parmenter
Assistant Dean
Coordinator of Faculty Advising

NEW STUDENT PRE-ORIENTATION AND ORIENTATION SCHEDULES

Pre-Enrollment (Wednesday, July 6th to Friday, July 15th): Incoming first-year students in the College of Arts and Sciences will be pre-enrolling in their classes online. Prior to doing so, we request that they work their way through the [College's New Student Orientation](#) website, which explains the Arts and Sciences degree requirements and gives advice about how to build their first-semester schedule. Once students have enrolled in courses, the freshman/sophomore deans check their schedules to make sure (a) that they have been submitted, and (b) that they are reasonable. Pre-enrollment should help prepare students more fully for their first meetings with you. Once pre-enrollment is over, you will be able to [check your advisees' schedules](#) .

Electronic balloting for first-year writing seminars (Wednesday, July 6th to Sunday, July 17th): First-year students may submit an electronic ballot for first-year writing seminars. Students submit their top five choices, and over 90% of students will receive one of their top three.

Orientation - Friday, August 19th to Monday, August 22nd:

New students have a very busy schedule during orientation weekend. Orientation events that are most relevant to faculty advising are as follows:

- **Friday, August 19th**: First-year students arrive on campus.
- **Saturday, August 20th**:
 - o Dean's Convocation, Arts Quad, 10:30 a.m.
 - o First-year briefing. In this briefing, the freshman/sophomore deans, A&S faculty members, and other university staff will tell students what to expect in their first year in Arts and Sciences and give advice on the transition between high school and Cornell--including how to interact with faculty members, strategies for effective time management, and advising resources available to them in Arts and Sciences.
- **Sunday, August 21st**:
 - o A series of smaller, more specialized briefings will be held on topics such as pre-health studies, study abroad, athletics and academics, entering as a transfer student, etc.
 - o A&S Academic Open House, Physical Sciences building, 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Representatives of each academic department in the College will be present to answer questions about the major/minor, specific courses, and course levels.
- **Monday, August 22nd**:
 - o First meetings with faculty advisors. Meetings are scheduled backward from 2:30 p.m. in half-hour increments. (No meetings are scheduled

from noon to 1:00 p.m., as first-year students will be meeting with their peer advisors at that time.)

- **Monday, August 22nd:** Add/drop for first-year students begins at 3:30 p.m.

THE FIRST ADVISING MEETING

Getting to know your advisees:

It's often a good idea to get to know your advisees a little bit before getting down to the conversation about their studies. This is not to suggest that you should be best friends with them, of course; but you may want to ask a few questions about their experiences moving into the dorm, for example, or what extracurricular activities they plan to get involved in, or what their families are like. Try to set them at their ease; many of them are very intimidated when they come to this, their first meeting with a Cornell professor.

You may also wish to tell them a bit about yourself, for example, briefly going over your research areas. It's also a good idea to talk, in the nicest possible way, about your expectations of what the advisor/advisee relationship will be. Let the students know the frequency with which you will communicate with them, whether you wish for them to consult with you before adding or dropping a class, whether it is best to make appointments with you or just come to your office hours, etc. Then, make the segue into advising them about their classes for the fall semester.

Getting to the advising:

Accessing your advisee information:

At data.arts.cornell.edu, you will be able to see a list of your advisees, the date and time you are meeting with each advisee, and information on each advisee, including a summary sheet (address, email, and telephone information; SAT scores; name of high school; and major interest). You will also be able to view the courses in which your advisee has pre-enrolled on their unofficial transcript.

Armed with all of this information, you can help the student plan for the first semester. Please keep in mind that the following few paragraphs are a suggestion for how to proceed with the planning, not a compulsory plan of action.

Major interests:

Given that students will have pre-enrolled in courses when they arrive for their appointment, you will be able to base your discussion on the list of courses your advisee has chosen. You can begin your discussion by asking, for example, how this particular set of courses fits in with your advisee's intellectual interests, potential major(s), and academic goals.

Choosing a schedule:

Your advisee should have pre-enrolled in a reasonable schedule, but you may have some questions as you look through his or her courses and talk about major interest(s):

- *How many credits should a student take in a given term?*

The minimum number of credits per semester for a full-time student is 12 academic credits, and the average number of credits per semester is 15-16 academic credits. (Academic credits, by the way, do not include **physical education courses, supplemental science and math courses offered by LSC, courses in remedial or developmental reading, service as a teaching assistant, EMT courses, and most NavS, MiIS and AirS courses**, except for those cross-listed with an academic department.) For a partial list of courses that do not count for academic credit, see [Courses That Do Not Count](#). If you are in doubt about whether a particular course counts, please consult an advising dean.)

- *How many courses are in a normal course load?*

Taking 15-16 credits usually works out to be four or five courses. Students who are certain of their course choices and don't want to overload themselves may want to take four courses. Other students will want to sign up for five courses and be able to drop the one they end up liking the least.

- *What advice should I give to undecided students?*

You should encourage students to explore their interests rather than thinking about their curriculum as a list of requirements they are trying to check off as quickly as they can. If they explore their interests in the first three semesters, many of the distribution requirements will take care of themselves, and students will have found majors in which they are really interested.

There are, of course, exceptions to this general advice. Students must take first-year writing seminars, and students should have a plan for satisfying their language requirement, particularly if they are interested in studying abroad later. I will explain these requirements more fully below.

- *How do I know which level of course to recommend?*

Keep in mind the level at which the student is entering, and help choose courses accordingly. You can look at the student's high school transcript and AP exam results for clues, and see the [Arts and Sciences advanced placement tables](#). The student may also have taken a Cornell placement test and will either know the

results or have an idea of two courses into which s/he might be placed. Last, the student should have gone to the academic open house on Sunday afternoon, and while there may have asked the DUS in the appropriate department about a given AP versus the Cornell course.

- *Why was I assigned an advisee with interests outside my discipline?*

We do our best to assign students to faculty advisors in fields in which they have an interest, but do keep in mind, if you have an undecided student or a student who intends to major in a field that cannot take pre-major advisees, s/he was by necessity assigned to you and therefore may not be interested in your field.

If your advisee is not interested in your field, please ask questions about the field in which s/he is interested. If you are unfamiliar with the courses in another discipline, show your advisee how to check the departmental website and/or contact the Director of Undergraduate Studies. If you wish, you could phone the appropriate DUS during the advising appointment.

- *My advisee wants to know about grade options. What do I tell him/her?*

Most students take courses for letter grades, but students have the option to take classes S/U, or satisfactory/unsatisfactory, particularly if a course is in a completely unfamiliar discipline and the student does not want the pressure of taking the course for a grade. Students should keep in mind that S is given for a grade of C- or above, and U is given for anything below a C-. All too often, students believe that S/U means pass/fail, and that is not the case, given that D- is our lowest passing grade. It's also important to note that courses taken S/U can almost never fulfill a major (or minor) requirement, so if your advisee thinks s/he may ultimately use a course toward a major or a minor, s/he should be advised to take the course for a letter grade.

- *My advisee expects me to know about every course at the university. How can I advise him when I may not know about a course outside my own department?*

You can tell him or her that you know about some courses but not all, since there are, after all, over 2000 courses in our College alone. If s/he wants to know about a particular course, s/he should talk to someone in the relevant department and ask more about the course. If your advisee has more general questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, you should feel free to call the advising office at 255-5004 to speak with one of the freshman/sophomore deans.

- *What should a first-year student's schedule look like?*

A sample courseload for a first-year student:

- First-year writing seminar (FWS): About 125 first-year writing seminars spanning almost all departments in the College (and some out-of-College departments) are offered each semester. Your advisee was able to ballot for his or her FWS beginning on Wednesday, July 6th and ending at 11:59 pm on July 17th. He or she selected five different FWS courses, and the FWS to which s/he was assigned was posted to his or her Student Center account in early August. Depending on the outcome of his or her FWS ballot, your advisee may want to spend part of the first meeting with you deciding whether s/he wants to change sections of his or her writing seminar. Such a change depends on availability of spots in the desired section, and, obviously, on whether the student's schedule will permit such a change without conflict. If there is a space and no conflicts, the student may drop and add as appropriate beginning at 3:30 p.m., on Monday, August 22nd.
- A foreign language course. Which language course a student selects depends on whether the student is beginning a new language or continuing one s/he began in high school. If an advisee would like to continue taking a language s/he began in high school, s/he should have taken or should take a placement exam. Depending on the language, placement exams are offered online in the summer and/or on campus during orientation. The language placement exam schedule is in the [new student orientation guide](#).
- A course in a possible major. If a course has a section and/or lab, the student needs to remember to sign up for these components as well.
- A course in a discipline s/he has not encountered before and in which s/he is interested.
- A physical education class. The student must take the required swim test and then sign up for a PE class. If the student cannot pass the swim test, swimming must be the first PE class. Please remind the student that PE is not an academic credit and that s/he needs to take at least 12 academic credits for the term.
- Another course of his or her choosing, if s/he wants to begin with five courses rather than four.

A sample courseload for a first-year pre-health student:

- First-year writing seminar (FWS). See above for an explanation for the procedure to ballot for a FWS. If the pre-health student is not intending to major in biology, chemistry, or mathematics, s/he may want to use the first-year writing seminar as a means to explore a possible major interest.
- Introductory biology (usually taken freshman or sophomore year)
- General chemistry (usually taken freshman year)
- Mathematics (usually taken freshman or sophomore year)
- Foreign language (see comments above)

➤ *PE* (see comments above)

For more in-depth advising on pre-health studies, please direct your advisees to Ana Adinolfi (health careers advisor for Arts and Sciences) or to their advising dean.

(Exception: Pre-health students intending to major in biology should see one of the advisors in the Undergraduate Office of Biology: Bonnie Comella, Jeff McCaffrey, Colleen Kearns, or Wendy Aquadro.)

- *What are the College of Arts and Sciences' requirements for graduation?*

The degree requirements, as created and voted upon by the faculty, are as follows:

- **34 courses.** A full course is 3 or 4 credits, a half course is 2 credits, and there are a few 1-credit courses in the music and theatre departments, that aggregate to form half (2 cr.) and full (4 cr.) courses.
- **120 credits, 100 of which must be from the College of Arts and Sciences.** Students sometimes wonder if they have to take 20 credits out of college or if they can only take 20 credits out of college. The bottom line is that the 100 credits in Arts is a minimum number, as is the 120 credits total. Students can take more than 20 credits out of college as long as they take 100 credits within; they can also take all their credits in Arts and accumulate more than 120.
- **Residence:** Eight full-time semesters, unless a student can successfully complete all other requirements in fewer than eight semesters and meet the additional criteria to accelerate graduation.
- **Passing a swimming test and two courses in physical education.** If a student does not pass his or her swimming test, beginning swimming will be the first physical education course. Students with a disability who desire a substitution for this requirement should see Dean Ray Kim, 172 Goldwin Smith, 255-4833.
- **Two first-year writing seminars.** If your advisee received a "5" on the English AP examination, s/he is exempted from one first-year writing seminar.
- **Fulfillment of the foreign language requirement,** which may be satisfied by one of the following options:
 - o Passing a non-introductory course in a foreign language at the 2000-level or above.
 - o Passing at least eleven credits of study in a single foreign language at Cornell.
 - o Exception: Students whose speaking, reading, and writing competence in some language other than English is at the level of native or near native competence or at the level demanded in a 4000-level seminar conducted in that language may be exempt from the college's language requirement. Please contact the advising office for more details.
- **Fulfillment of distribution requirements.** Distribution requirements include the following:
 - o **Four courses in Physical & Biological Sciences, and in Mathematics and Quantitative Reasoning:** Students must take 2 courses in Physical & Biological Sciences, denoted by PBS-AS or PBSS-AS in Courses of Study, 1

Mathematics & Quantitative Reasoning, denoted by MQR-AS, and 1 course that is either PBS-AS, PBSS-AS, or MQR-AS.

- o **Five courses of 3 or more credits in the following social sciences, humanities, and arts categories:**

- **Cultural Analysis (CA-AS)**
- **Historical Analysis (HA-AS)**
- **Knowledge, Cognition, & Moral Reasoning (KCM-AS)**
- **Literature & the Arts (LA-AS)**
- **Social & Behavioral Analysis (SBA-AS)**

Important notes:

- If a student is searching for a course that will fulfill a particular distribution or breadth requirement, s/he can go to [Courses of Study](#) or the [class roster](#) and search the document for a particular distribution code such as KCM-AS or CA-AS. Please note the addition of the -AS to the distribution codes, made necessary because other colleges at the university have adopted our distribution codes. If the code is not followed by -AS, the course does not count toward our distribution requirements.
 - The courses must come from at least four of the five rubrics (and may include courses in the major).
 - No more than three of the five courses (including cross-listed courses) may be from the offerings of any one department.
 - For many departments, different courses may fall under different categories.
 - A course itself will only fall under one category.
- **Breadth requirements:**
 - o **Geographic breadth requirement:** Students must include in their undergraduate program at least one Arts and Sciences course that focuses on an area or a people other than those of the United States, Canada, or Europe. Courses fulfilling this requirement are designated GB in [Courses of Study](#).
 - o **Historic breadth requirements:** Students must include in their undergraduate program at least one Arts and Sciences course that focuses on an historic period before the twentieth century. Courses fulfilling this requirement are designated HB in [Courses of Study](#).
- Notes:**
- Students may use the same course to satisfy both breadth requirements. Such courses are designated GHB in [Courses of Study](#).
 - Distribution and major courses may overlap with the breadth requirements.
- **Fulfillment of a major.** Students must declare a major by the end of the sophomore year, and the courses will usually take up a third of their entire courseload. In the junior and senior years, students usually take one half of their courses in their majors.

- **Electives:** Four or five courses (totaling at least 15 credits), not used to fulfill other requirements and not in the major field. (Students with two or more majors are exempted from this requirement).
- **Application to graduate:** This form must be submitted in the semester before the one in which the student wishes to graduate. Students receive information about this at the beginning of the senior year.
- *If my advisee wishes to change his/her course selections, how does (s)he do so?*

Your advisee can add or drop courses through his/her Student Center account when the add/drop period begins at 3:30 p.m. on Monday evening, Aug. 22nd.

ADVISING AFTER ORIENTATION:

- *How can I follow up easily with my advisee(s)?*

Data.arts lists the [net IDs of your advisees](#) so that you may email them all at once. We suggest that faculty advisors use this list to e-mail their advisees a few weeks before the pre-enrollment period begins for the ensuing semester. This is a very good time to check in with your advisees to see how the current semester is going and also discuss what course selections the student may have in mind for the next semester.

- *What are the semester deadlines that my student will have to meet?*

Every semester, we have students who miss registrar's deadlines, which are voted upon by the faculty and enforced by the advising office. For example, a student might come in eight weeks into the term, say she didn't realize until that day that she had selected the S/U option for a given class, and want to change to a letter grade. Had the student looked at "Student Center" only the week before, she could have changed the grade option online; but after the drop deadline midway through the semester, students must keep whatever grade options they have selected. If you can, then, please remind your advisees that they need to know these deadlines and that they should carefully review their course enrollments in "Student Center" before the deadlines to make sure that the schedules they think they have are the schedules they actually have. The dates for the fall 2016 semester are as follows:

- Tuesday, September 6th:
 - Deadline to add courses freely. After this point, courses may only be added by petition.
- Tuesday, October 18th:

- Deadline to drop courses freely. After this point, students may petition to withdraw from a course until the end of week 12. If they do, they will receive a “W” instead of a letter grade on the transcript.
 - Deadline to change a course grade option from S/U to letter or vice versa. Important note: Please be aware that this is a firm deadline and that the student will not be able to petition for the change after this date.
- Friday, November 18th:
 - Deadline to petition to withdraw from a course.
- *What if my advisee has problems?*

If your advisee has problems, whether personal or academic, do not hesitate to call one of the advising deans at 255-5004 or 255-4833. Often, we will have received phone calls or emails from other faculty members about the student, and we like to have as full a picture as possible so that we can help the student.

If you are concerned about a student’s psychological well-being but feel that you are not in an emergency situation, please telephone the advising office to let us know.

If you have immediate concerns about a student’s safety and feel that you are in an emergency situation, please stay with the student and telephone Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) directly at 255-5208 (255-5155 after hours), or Cornell Police at 255-1111.

- *I’ve been told that I need to keep student records confidential. What are the rules surrounding confidentiality?*

Faculty members and students are often concerned about confidentiality. Confidentiality rules are based on the need to know. If the person to whom you are speaking really needs to know and is authorized to know, then you are allowed to talk to them. Responses to particular parties are as follows:

- *Parents or anyone outside the college:* Please refer phone calls from parents to the advising office (255-5004 or 255-4833).
- *Colleagues:* You may tell colleagues things you have directly observed about a particular student’s behavior, but you may not tell them grades or other items of record unless they need to know, for example, in order to decide whether a student should receive honors or a departmental award.
- *Advising deans:* You may tell us anything about a student, including grades. We sometimes need this information to be able to figure out whether a student is telling us the full extent of his or her academic problems.

You may also be concerned about the fact that the information you receive may be more limited than that which you give to medical professionals or advising deans. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Medical professions have a stricter code of confidentiality than anyone else at the university. They are not allowed to divulge information about a student to anyone unless they have that student's express written permission.
 - Advising deans will be able to listen to anything you have to tell us about a student, and we can tell medical professionals about concerns you or we have about a student. We will, however, be unable to divulge any information about a student to a faculty member unless the information pertains directly to a course taught by that faculty member or unless the faculty member is the student's faculty advisor and therefore needs a full picture of the student's circumstances.
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- *What online advising resources are there, and what information can I find there?*
 - data.arts.cornell.edu
 - Unofficial transcripts
 - Degree audit information (DUST report)
 - Incoming students' summary sheets listing contact information, high school, test scores, birth date, and net id.
 - Student Records (including high school transcript and admissions essays)
 - [Faculty Center](#):
 - Current schedule
 - Photograph
 - Transcript
 - Test scores
 - Contact information
 - Pre-enrollment information

For your reference:

- [Courses of Study](#)
- [Class Roster](#)
- [Cornell Code of Academic Integrity](#)

Please remember that if you have any questions, you should not hesitate to contact the advising office at 255-5004 (first-year students and sophomores) or 255-4833 (juniors and seniors).