



## Academic Advising Tip Sheet

### Number 1: Winter 2010/11

*Compiled by Undergraduate Retention Committee with input from Undergraduate Coordinator's Committee*

Good advising can help to improve retention, an important issue at UDM. Taking the time to find out how your advisees are doing both in and out of the classroom will go a long way to retaining students, especially our freshman and sophomore students.

### Preparing for the Advising Appointment

Here are a few things to remember to do during fall advising:

#### 1. Look up the student's mid-term grades before the appointment.

Before you mention the grades to the student, ask them how they think they are doing in their courses. This conversation will often be very informative for both of you. Don't judge the student on how well their grades are reflected in their answer. Some students really won't know that their grades are as bad as they are. Engage the student in a conversation to make them realize that low grades at mid-term are not going to go away without hard work. Discuss the reasons for poor performance and possible solutions to problem areas.

#### 2. Make sure you provide the student with information on services available to them at UDM.

Many students do not realize how much help they can get, for free on campus. If the students are having issues with academics, refer them to the **Learning Center** (MCN Library, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 313-993-1143) and/or the **Writing Center** (Briggs 135, 313-993-1022). If they are having problems at home, let them know they can use the **Personal Counseling Center** (West Quad Residence Hall, 313-993-1170). If they are looking for part-time or post-graduation employment refer them to the **Career Education Center** (Reno Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 313-993-1017). If they are experiencing financial problems, refer them to **Financial Aid** (Fisher, Ground Floor, 313-993-3350).

#### 3. Follow up with the student after the appointment.

We all know that suggesting that a student get a tutor or go to the learning center does not always result in the student actually doing so. Follow up with students experiencing difficulties. Let the students know you are there to help them. Have students come back to your office for a follow up appointment in a few weeks to discuss what changes they have made to affect improvement. It shows you care -- and often that will be the difference between retaining and losing the student.

#### 4. Advise the student. Do not just sign off on the student's schedule.

One of the biggest ways advisors can adversely affect retention is to just sign off on a schedule of classes without ever having a meaningful conversation with the students about where they are in terms of their education, how they are doing, and what their plans are post UDM. While it is ultimately the responsibility of the student to select their courses, part of advising is giving good advice and the only way to do that is to get to know your advisees. Make sure the courses fit into the career plans of the students and don't just fulfill requirements for a major or the core. Make sure that the student has the necessary pre-reqs and co-reqs for courses selected before the student leaves the appointment. The placement of a course within the curriculum can be very important for students considering professional school and taking entrance exams after their sophomore year or during their junior year. Encourage students to challenge themselves and make sure they realize that just completing the "minimum requirements" might not get them very far in real life.



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### The Advising Appointment

Though the variety of topics covered in an advising appointment depends upon the purpose of the appointment, a certain structure or process is common to all. Following is an overview of some techniques that can be used in an advising session.

- 1. Opening** -- Greet the student by name and in a relaxed manner. The student may be nervous so a warm welcome and a low-key question such as "What can I help you with today?" can be reassuring at the same time that it gets the session started.
- 2. Talking with the Student** -- The student may find it difficult to express himself. Resist the temptation to "help" by putting words in the student's mouth, finishing the sentence yourself or otherwise taking over the conversation. Careful phrasing of your questions and indicating that you are receptive to the responses should facilitate good communication.
- 3. Silences in the Conversation** -- Silences do not necessarily mean a breakdown in communication or a lack of activity. The student (or the advisor) may be searching for words or reflecting upon something that has already been said.
- 4. Admitting your Ignorance** -- If the student asks a question regarding factual information to which you do not know the answer, admit it. Get the information immediately, if possible, or call the student back. While one person cannot be expected to know everything, it is reasonable to expect the advisor to get the information in question. Students have greater respect for the advisor who does not hesitate to admit his ignorance.
- 5. Avoiding the Personal Pronoun** -- Using the word "I" turns the focus of the advising session away from the advisee, toward the advisor. Expressions like "if I were you, I would" and "I think" express the advisor's opinion or experiences and are inappropriate unless they are explicitly requested. Most of the time, the advisor's role is not to express his point of view, but rather, to help the student to formulate his own opinion.
- 6. Bad News** When the advisor must give the student bad news, it is not helpful to minimize the gravity of the situation or to be unrealistically optimistic about what the student can do to handle it. However, it is very important that the advisor continue to express an attitude that is receptive and non-judgmental. She can demonstrate her support of the student by helping to put the issue into proper perspective and focusing attention on the positive actions that can be taken to resolve the problem. This may require additional appointments.
- 7. Additional Problems** -- Sometimes the student will have unexpressed questions or problems beyond the one that appears to be the reason for the appointment. The advisor can give the student an opening by asking, "Is there something else you would like to ask about?" or "Do you have something else on your mind?"
- 8. The Frequent Visitor** -- One of the most difficult advisees to work with will meet frequently with his advisor. This student appears to be receptive to the advisor's suggestions and will often say "I feel so much better after talking to you," but, in fact, never follows up on the information and strategies discussed during the appointment. This student seems to continue to hope that talking about something will make it happen. Other frequent visitors are sympathy seekers, complainers and the overly dependent. While it is true that their willingness to keep appointments indicates some success on the part of the advisor, they take up time that could be available to other students.
- 9. Setting Limits on the Appointment** -- The appointment is normally a fixed length of time. It is better if the advisor and advisee realize this from the beginning. Follow-up appointments can be made, if necessary. However, there are times when an advisor sees a student in crisis and time constraints need to be set aside.
- 10. Ending the Appointment** -- When the advising session is finished, it is easy to get overly involved in casual conversation. This can extend the appointment far beyond the allotted time. A phrase such as, "Do you think we have done all we can for today?" or "Let's make another appointment to get into this further" effectively maintains a friendly yet professional tone.

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