

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDENT ADVISING AND LEARNING CENTER

October 2005

The Student Advising and Learning Center (SALC) provide services to promote student persistence and academic success during their undergraduate experience, and beyond. The five areas that the SALC oversees are:

1. Academic advising for “undecided” students; coordination of advising for those with declared majors through collaboration with the Schools.
2. New Student Orientation.
3. Prestigious Scholarship competition advising and support.
4. Pre-professional graduate advising and support (health-related professions, law).
5. Learning support (tutoring, skills workshops, student success workshops).

1. Academic Advising

Currently, there are two academic advisors housed in the SALC, one with full-time responsibilities for working with the undecided, and the Director of the SALC, who dedicates approximately .3 FTE of her appointment to such endeavors. This staff reports to the area of Student Affairs. Academic advising services in the SALC include: course selection and planning each semester; guidance throughout the semesters with regard to adding, dropping and succeeding in classes; referral services to resources on campus and off that enhance student wellness and success in college; workshops on how to choose a major, and how to navigate the UC Merced graduation requirements; drop-in opportunities nearly always available for general conversations and support to students; information regarding general policies relevant to any aspect of the student experience.

2. New Student Orientation

New Student Orientation is a program offered and strongly encouraged for all incoming students; it is offered concurrently with a program for parents and families. The inaugural season of New Student Orientation comprised five full-day events throughout July and August, each with 140-220 students in attendance. A similar program is offered for one day in January for incoming spring students.

Program content for New Student Orientation consists of: readiness exam administration in chemistry and pre-calculus, for students in related majors; academic advising; course registration; information sessions on all manners of student service such as campus police, dining, career services, counseling, financial aid, registration, resident life, student activities, and much more. This event also includes sample lectures offered by faculty members to help familiarize students with the classroom environment in college. The parents’ program covers similar topics, in addition to a faculty panel and a student panel for questions and answers.

The 2005 New Student Orientation received excellent reviews from its participants. Students and parents attended at an anomalous rate, compared nationally and within the UC system, with a ratio of 4 parents for every 3 students in attendance, and approximately 90% of all undergraduates participating. The SALC also coordinates new graduate student orientation, with 100% attendance in 2005.

Further innovations are planned for New Student Orientation, including addition of an overnight component, and expansion of academic content within the event.

3. Prestigious Scholarship Competitions

The SALC is headquarters for information and application support, interview coaching, and referral services for students aiming to participate in highly competitive programs such as the Truman, British Marshall and others. In collaboration with the three Schools, the SALC Director distributes information about these programs to all freshmen at their first interaction with an advisor. It is the focus of the SALC to educate all students and their family members about highly prestigious programs beginning in the freshman year, in order to facilitate long-term goal-setting for ambitious students.

4. Pre-Professional Graduate Program Admissions Advising and Support

In collaboration with the School of Natural Sciences and Career Services, the SALC assists students who are planning to apply to medical, dental or other health professions programs with strategies for building their experience and competitiveness for such. The SALC Director works with student club leaders to coordinate informative workshops that help to prepare aspiring medical professionals, and pre-law students, by networking with professionals and organizations connected to the relevant fields of specialization.

5. Learning Support (tutoring, skills workshops, student success workshops)

A primary function of the SALC is to provide **peer tutoring** for courses that develop students' basic skills in pre-chemistry, writing and pre-calculus. Approximately 80 hours weekly of tutoring in these areas is available on a drop-in basis, free of charge to students in these courses. Approximately 70 hours of one-on-one writing tutoring is also available each week. Paid tutors are selected from the student body based on their background and accomplishments in the related fields of study, in collaboration with faculty when appropriate. The SALC Director trains the tutors on an ongoing basis in areas such as communication skills, methods for promoting self-empowerment among learners, eliciting questions, how to ask probing questions, referral processes to student services for peers in need of other forms of assistance, intercultural awareness, and techniques for advancing writing skills in one-on-one tutorials. Training occurs through group meetings, ongoing readings and e-mail exchanges with the Director, and required, weekly written reflections on different topics in tutoring.

Tutorials are also available in first-year physics, and writing support for first-year history and literature courses, in response to faculty and student requests. Availability of tutoring is ample for those who request it.

Study and other skills workshops are offered periodically, in response to faculty requests, in addition to regular planning. Attendance at these workshops is voluntary. The first three workshops, in time management, study skills, and test-taking strategies attracted a total of 134 students. Further workshop topics for the 2005-06 year include: motivation, test anxiety, know your learning style, goal setting, and utilizing your faculty office hours.

Student Success Workshops are offered at mid-semester, shortly after mid-semester grade reports are issued. All students in lower-division courses receive a mid-semester grade report online, issued by their instructors in collaboration with the Registrar. A registration hold is placed on all freshmen with a D or F grade in any course at mid-semester. In order to have the hold released, these students are required to attend a Student Success Workshop.

These workshops last one hour, and they open with a self-assessment exercise in which students identify, by a check-off list, elements that may be affecting their ability to work to their fullest potential. These items include personal issues (relationships, family pressures, health and dietary problems, depression and loneliness, easily distracted by friends), academic issues (under-prepared for courses, unsure how to take notes, weak study skills, skipping classes, skipping reading assignments, poor self-discipline, substituting memorization for learning), and motivation (unsure about wanting to be in college, feeling that life is “on hold,” lack of interest in learning). After this exercise, the students listen to a brief presentation on academic policies and the consequences of poor academic standing. Finally, the students break into small groups facilitated by academic advisors, student services staff members and faculty volunteers to discuss their self-assessments and the potential solutions to their problems. The session ends with each student writing and reading aloud to his or her group a success plan, listing at least 5 changes that they will make. Facilitators keep copies of the success plans, and they contact the students after the workshop to see to it that the students are working their way out of academic peril.

6. Overview of Academic Advising in the Schools

School Advisors work with students in the majors offered in their areas specifically, and they see their advisees through to degree completion. The Schools of Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, and Engineering each have one full-time academic advisor. Their duties consist of: course selection with their students and planning each semester; guidance throughout the semesters with regard to adding, dropping and succeeding in classes; referral services to resources on campus and off that enhance student wellness and success in college; workshops on how to choose a major, and how to

navigate the UC Merced graduation requirements; drop-in opportunities nearly always available for general conversations and support to students; information regarding general policies relevant to any aspect of the student experience.

School advisors and SALC advisors meet regularly to discuss curricular and policy changes, and to collaborate on innovations to their practices. School advisors work within Academic Affairs, although they serve as a key conduit between their area, and Student Affairs.