

Planning the Next Steps

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Context: Advising; first-year experience, individual reflection

Keywords: advising, first-year students, academic planning

Student Activity Time: 30 minutes

Students are engaged in a reflective advising session.

Introducing the Reflection Activity

The engineering program at Highline College aims to prepare students from a variety of academic backgrounds to transfer into the engineering program of their choice as a junior level student. In the advising meeting, students were asked to think about the big picture of their life, prior preparation for engineering, and other factors that will influence their life as a student. The faculty advisor walks each student through a list of about 13 topics that broaden the students' view of what it means to major in engineering. The purpose of the advising session was to set and reorient expectations, identify skills and goals, and introduce college life to students.

Students scheduled their 30 minute appointments with an online appointment scheduling tool. After introductions and settling into the meeting, the faculty advisor asked "where do you see yourself in ten years?" Based on the student's response, the advisor covered topics such as: work style, preferred work environment, the 4-year institutions of interest, and obligations outside of school. Once a big picture of the students' goals and life situation were discussed, the advisor introduced some practical resources available within the engineering program and the campus. Students were also introduced to ABET and the engineering program search tool as a means to expose them to the vast opportunities available in engineering. Advisors also discussed immediate concerns related to registration for the upcoming quarter. Students and advisors discussed mathematics placement and past science courses, in order to build an appropriate schedule for the quarter. English, foreign language and other general education requirements were also discussed so that students can build their course schedule to prepare them to transfer to a 4-year school as a junior.

After the foundational course plan is developed, advisors introduced financial aid, campus organizations, academic resources, and success habits. Academic programs, scholarship opportunities and other campus based initiatives were also introduced and discussed. As the meeting comes to an end, the registration process and scheduling a follow up meeting were the final components of the advising session. The thorough meeting agenda of approximately 13 important topics, students adjusted and reoriented their expectations for college and majoring in engineering. Students began to develop a vision for their pathway to becoming an engineer and enhanced awareness of success habits for engineering students.

The outcomes of the advising meeting are broad and vary from student to student, however the essential goal was to equip students with knowledge and resources for a successful semester. Further, the advising meeting aimed to establish a relationship between the faculty member and student in order to assist the student in navigating their time on campus.

Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Familiarize yourself with the curriculum sequence within and outside of the department.
2	Connect with offices in academic and student affairs to become knowledgeable of resources available to students.
3	Set up an online meeting request system and enter your schedule for meeting with students. Distribute this link to students.
4	Connect the meeting agenda.
5	Identify homework or actions for students to take.
6	Schedule a follow up meeting.
7	Debrief the assignment after it has been graded and returned via course management tool. If students were disgruntled about the activity, engage the students in a discussion about the purpose of the reflection activity.

DIGITAL LIBRARY CONTENT	
1.1	Upper division admission requirements
1.2	Highline College Student Advising Plan
1.3	Highline Advising Agenda

In the words of the Educator: Tips and Tricks

Know the curriculum. To do this successfully, you certainly need to know your program well and the transfer options available to your students. You need to know the services that your campus offers for financial aid, learning centers, career advising, and who the point of contact is for those services. Beyond that, you also need to take some time to learn the courses outside of the department that students need to take, the prerequisites, and the timetable that certain classes are offered.

Ask life questions. Although it's not concrete, the human relations piece is very important. You can't be afraid to ask what initially might seem like personal questions, like "who lives in your household? How do you plan to pay for college?" They are personal questions, yet it is important to know if they are living with several extended family members or it's just them and their parents. It matters too if they are living on their own and struggling to pay the rent. Many students don't think much about how they will actually pay for college. At least I think these things are important, so not being afraid to ask some personal questions, but knowing the limit is important.

Acknowledge your long term commitment to students. You also have to commit. When you see that student on campus it matters that you connect and remember so you can ask about a placement test or how an English class is going. That part means a ton to students. We know the advising meeting is working because the

students come back and tell us. They send us e-mails when they get their 4-year degree and say, “thank you, you made a difference.” We also see that it works when we take students to visit the 4-year schools. We will sit down at lunch or Q&A time with previous students and hear them giving our advice to the students—it’s just priceless. You hear them saying “oh, you need to spend time on campus, and you need to study in groups.” I just smile and say, “yeah, where did you learn that?”

What was the inspiration for the reflection activity? The advising session has evolved so much over time. When I first started, I was pretty focused on the academic plan. For me, there is still a lot of learning involved because the plan depends so much on what engineering discipline they are interested in and where they want to transfer, so there are so many pieces to put together. There was such a learning curve to learn all of the pre-engineering requirements for the disciplines and schools that our students are interested in. Once I mastered that part, I feel like I could improve and focus on building connections with students. I realized how important connecting with the students really was because I would see them in class, but they were not coming back every quarter for advising. I decided that it might help them continue to seek advice if they knew that there is somebody wanting to see them every quarter and giving them various things to prepare them for their goals.

What I want them to develop as a result of this meeting is a vision of what their path will be to achieve their goals. I want them to have the actual academic plan so then when it is time to register they can jump in and select classes. I also want them to see the breadth of opportunities that they have here at Highline and how many resources are available to them. The meeting also helps them realize that if they get stumped, or things in the plan do not work out immediately, they have a connection with a faculty member.