



# UCF Liberal Arts and Sciences Academic Advising Handbook

**Note:**

This handbook was developed at UCF and is included in the [CREATES Toolkit for Faculty Advising](#) as an example of a higher education advising tool or practice.

For more information and additional educational tools, visit: <http://europe-creates.eu>

## Liberal Arts and Sciences – Academic Advising Handbook 2017-2018

### Introduction

This handbook is intended as a resource and is addressed directly to the advising staff of the LAS program. The current list of active advisors is as follows:

Nicholas Buchanan  
Simon Büchner  
Wolfgang Freitag  
Achim Gehrke  
Sebastian Gehart  
Ursula Glunk  
Denise Kaltschütz  
Veronika Lipphardt  
Liudmila Mikalayeva  
Matthias Möller  
Stoyan Panov  
Ryan Plumley  
Sabine Sané  
Elina Schleutker  
Paul Sterzel  
Andree Weber

The first section of the handbook outlines the overall goals, and subsequent sections describe best practices for advising. If you have any questions about the Handbook or about advising, please feel free to contact me.

Ryan Plumley  
Lecturer and Course Coordinator for Culture and History  
Academic Advising Coordinator  
UCF  
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## 1. The Goals of Academic Advising

### Overview

The LAS program of UCF approaches Bachelor-level education as an opportunity for students to learn broadly about the human and the non-human world, to develop systematically their capacity for high-level intellectual work and exchange with others, and to unfold gradually their own unique abilities and interests. Our BA education is not training in a specific discipline or linear professionalization directed by expert authorities. Instead, we conceive of the educational experience of our students as a project of self-directed exploration (especially in the Major and Electives) coordinated with shared learning (especially in the Core).

One way that we try to give substance to these aspirations is through academic advising. Advising supports self-directed exploration by providing informed choice and meaningful guidance. It supports shared learning by providing steady exchange between students and faculty. The advisor-advisee relationship sustains teaching and learning beyond narrowly academic goals and in a one-on-one setting. It also gives space for a healthy range of mentoring and professional relationships between students and faculty to flourish.

Concretely, advising should deal with the important and decisive moments in students' education. Such moments include study decisions like which Major to choose or where and how to study abroad, but they may also include matters of personal development like adjusting to the demands of university study, experiencing culture shock (especially for the international students), or planning a career after the BA.

The advisor may also be the first contact person for the resolution of grievances or mediation of conflicts with respect to the advisee's relationships in and with the institution.

In LAS, the advisor-advisee relationship is based on reciprocal responsibilities. On the one hand, the advisor should be available for consultation, responsive to student needs and requests, and engaged in the four-year lifecycle of students' learning experiences. On the other hand, the advisee should be sensitive to faculty's many other responsibilities, reasonable about requests for assistance, and ultimately responsible for their own successful completion of the program. Faculty advisors are neither an information service nor a substitute for self-directed planning on the part of students. Instead, while they may be an important resource for expertise or information, their primary function is to help students with their own planning.

Professionalism and collegiality are the ideal modes of advising in LAS. In fact, giving students the opportunity to practice professionalism in a low-risk environment is an ancillary benefit of the advising system. Working closely with a more professionally experienced person allows students to practice some of the skills of clear communication, polite form, and team work that will serve them in their later work life. Likewise, collegiality—the mutual respect of equals in the context of a shared project—contributes to the vitality of UCF's intellectual community.

Although not necessary or required for a successful advising relationship, we expect and hope that some advisors and advisees will develop a longer-term mentorship relationship. Such relations are a positive outcome of close student-faculty exchange and contribute to the overall educational experience of LAS.

Academic advising requires a high level of commitment from advisors. They should plan and arrange regular meetings with their advisees and accept reasonable requests for meetings from advisees. The advisor should be involved in and remain informed about their advisees' choice of the major, course choice, independent projects, study abroad plans, and educational or professional ambitions.

## **Mission**

With this overview in mind, the aims of academic advising can be summarized in the following way:

### **Academic Advising Mission Statement**

Academic advising in the LAS program at UCF fosters students' informed and self-directed planning and successful completion of the four-year curriculum. Advising is undertaken in the spirit of professionalism and collegiality, with mutual respect and reciprocal responsibilities between advisor and advisee. Ideally, such academic advising cultivates the personal growth, professional maturity, and intellectual development of students.

### **Course Choice**

The Foundation Year is largely pre-set and requires minimal advising input. But in later years, students may need more guidance choosing courses within and beyond LAS that meet their individual needs and the formal demands of the program.

### **Major Choice**

The choice of major is one of the most important decisions a student will make in LAS. Some students arrive in the program certain of their choice, but then develop interests in another direction. Other students arrive completely uncertain about their major, but develop a clear direction in the first year. And, of course, some students continue to struggle even after a year of study. Advisors can help students acquire some perspective on what often can often seem like an existential choice for students.

### **Study Abroad**

Because LAS emphasizes intercultural skills and intelligent multi-lingualism, we encourage our students to incorporate study abroad into their four-year program. And most of our students are eager to study abroad. But planning and coordinating such study presents difficulties of various kinds: administrative (e.g., acquiring a spot in an exchange program), academic (e.g., credit transfer), and personal (e.g., culture shock). Advisors can support students in planning a practically plausible and academically suitable period abroad, based on students' expressed interests and goals.

However, advisors are not responsible to plan for students or even to provide basic informational resources. Instead, study abroad should be primarily coordinated by students themselves, with assistance and advice from advisors. See the resource list below for specific information.

### **Independent Projects**

The LAS program provides significant scope for student-driven, independent study initiatives. The guidelines and procedures for independent projects—including, for example, internships for elective credit, supervised independent study, or external language courses—are available on the Info Board of ILIAS. Students may approach the advisor about incorporating such projects into their studies.

### **Next Steps: Internships, MA Programs, Careers, Etc.**

LAS students often have ambitious plans and creative ideas for their professional lives. But they also sometimes feel bewildered about the range of things they could aspire to or become. Taking constructive steps in a certain direction is part of their studies and the immediate period after finishing their Bachelor degree. They may wish to consult their advisor about whether their plans are coherent or about how to formulate a coherent plan in the first place. Advisors are not responsible to know the landscape of opportunities for each student, but can help them to navigate the landscape they have encountered along their path.

### 3. Scheduling Advising

Advisors should be available for consultations with advisees throughout the regular academic calendar. Scheduling of such meetings can be handled any way the advisor sees fit, whether ad hoc, through regular advising hours, or during specified periods of the academic calendar. Advisors may also find it useful to schedule group meetings in periods when students have many similar questions. Students are responsible to contact their advisor in a timely fashion for specific requests (e.g., letters of recommendation) or time sensitive planning (e.g., study abroad).

In addition, one mandatory and two suggested meetings are outlined below.

#### **First Year Students**

October-November: First meeting

An initial advising meeting should be planned within the first month of study for all first year-students. Each advisee needs the opportunity to meet their advisor, familiarize themselves with the advising system, and address any immediate concerns about the beginning of their university study. This meeting is mandatory.

#### **Second-Year Students**

April-May: Second-Year Check-in

At this point, second-year students are approaching the definitive choice about their Major, and also must complete a number of requirements (language and Core) in order to continue after the fourth semester. This is a good time to have a meeting with each advisee to confirm that they are on schedule to graduate in a timely manner.

#### **Fourth-Year Students**

October-November: Planning to Finish

Students entering their fourth year of study will likely need advice about the end of their BA study (e.g., applying for MA programs, or entering the work world).

The following contains advice about best practices for a range of specific advising matters. It is not an exhaustive list of advising concerns, nor does it aspire to account for every advising scenario.

### **Collegiality not Hierarchy**

As guides in a student-centered process of self-cultivation, advisors are not authorities who approve or disapprove of particular student choices. Instead, in line with the guiding principles of the LAS program as a whole, advisors are educators who seek to provide a productive environment for student-driven learning. Such learning goes beyond formal academic education and includes personal and professional development. Hence, faculty are expected to be more than experts in their fields—they are also expected to be educators in a broader sense that includes advising, guiding, and mentoring students in an important phase of their lives.

### **Wearing Different Hats: Distinguishing Advising from Other Roles**

Advising is distinct from teaching, administration of a Major, or other faculty functions. Combining advising with these other jobs can unnecessarily burden the advisor-advisee relationship, reintroduce hierarchy, distract attention away from the goals of advising, and even produce conflicts of interest.

That being said, there are many equally effective advising styles. And some advisors may find it convenient or appropriate to combine roles on an ad hoc basis. As a matter of best practice, advisors should at least distinguish between their role as teaching faculty, major coordinator, administrator, and academic advisor, choosing self-consciously which hat(s) to wear at what point.

For instance, in your role as an advisor, you wish to remain a sympathetic guide for a particular student's educational development. However, that same student was very unhappy about the last course that he took with you as the instructor. And you are a little resentful that the student did not fully commit to the pedagogical plan that you envisioned. In such a case, the student might ask to discuss the course along with their own uncertainty about the LAS program as a whole. For the purposes of the meeting, you might ask to bracket discussion of that particular course, emphasizing that the evaluation system is the right place for such feedback. That way, both parties can focus on finding a good path forward in the spirit of collegial exchange.

### **Information Flow**

Advising is not primarily an information service. Information about LAS, about the Majors, about study abroad, about independent projects, etc., is available on the Info Board, the Major Interest Group boards, and the Student Handbook. That being said, as faculty in the LAS program, advisors are often in a good position to help orient students and clarify information, especially for first-year students.

When appropriate, advisors should do their best to provide accurate information, honestly acknowledging the limits of their knowledge. Referral to other people or agencies is often appropriate (e.g., about the specifics of another Major), but advisors should keep in mind the many demands on the time of their colleagues. Whenever possible, the advisor should refer students to publicly available information.

Informational flow in the other direction—that is, from the students to the faculty—should ideally take another form than advising. Feedback about the program, ideas for the curriculum, and related information should be handled through the students' elected representatives or in dedicated feedback and evaluation events in the Majors.

### **Letters of Reference and Recommendation**

In support of students' academic and professional success, advisors may be asked to write letters of reference or recommendation. LAS advising provides close contact between faculty and students and ought to be a significant competitive advantage for our students. As academic, personal, and professional guides over



four years, advisors should be in a position to write about their advisees in a more specific and detailed way than is possible in other study programs.

Under no circumstances is the advisor obliged to write such letters. And, obviously, advisors should not write letters when they cannot honestly recommend a student. However, given the limited number of faculty contacts available to students in these first few years of the program, advisors should be disposed to assist their advisees by writing such letters whenever feasible.

Even when the advisor has limited academic experience with a particular student—e.g., has never had that student in class—he or she might be able to offer substantive insight into other positive qualities of the student (e.g., community involvement, intellectual curiosity, maturity, motivation, etc.). Advisors should carefully consider what specific and positive things they can honestly confirm about a particular student before agreeing to write a letter or not.

### **Unreasonable Demands: “Where do I find...? How do I...? What should I...?”**

Students sometimes have unreasonable expectations from their advisors. They may expect the advisor to know every University regulation in detail or to be a storehouse of information about all Masters programs in a certain field. They may think that the advisor should plan their study abroad for them or even make a significant personal decision for them. Such overblown expectations are normal, especially for younger and less experienced students. Advising is a learning opportunity wherein students can check their expectations about professional and institutional life against reality. In these cases, it is best to gently remind students that the advisor is not primarily an information service or an expert authority in all matters. The advisor is rather a source of guidance for their own efforts to strategically plan their education.

While advisors should not do student work for them, they can do their best to be informed about where information is available. Some information resources are listed below in the last section of the Handbook.

### **Personal Matters**

Because the advisor is an immediate contact person for the LAS program, a neutral contact person for University-related problems, and ideally a sympathetic companion in their educational journey, students may come to their advisor with more personal problems. Such cases should be dealt with carefully, confidentially, and with due consideration of the advisor's professional limitations. If solicited, friendly or avuncular advice about personal matters is certainly reasonable and appropriate. But advisors should not offer advice that they are not professionally qualified to give.

In particular, students with medical, psychological, financial, and legal difficulties should be referred to the relevant institutions and services. Some of these resources are listed in the last section of the Handbook.

### **Changing Advisors**

Should an advisor-advisee partnership fail for some reason, leading to an inability to work together, either side can ask for a change. Switches will be handled on a case by case basis between the people directly involved. If mediation is necessary, the Dean of Studies (Wolfgang Freitag) is the appropriate contact person.

### **Academic Failures and Other Problems**

Some students will struggle academically in our program and some will not commit to it fully. Advisors should remember that they are not responsible for students' academic success or their completion of the program. As guides and assistants, our function is to maximize student success, regardless of the situation, but each student retains responsibility for their own academic path.

Other faculty may approach you about a particular student's difficulties (not coming to class, failures of examinations, etc.). Such cases should be treated carefully and with respect for the student's character and choic-

es. It is appropriate to politely ask if a student needs extra help during a period of difficulty in the program. However, in general, advisors should only address student failures when solicited to do so by the student.

### **Limiting Time Commitments**

Advising is a rewarding form of faculty-student interaction. It can be quite enjoyable to spend an hour or more speaking to one student, getting to know him or her, being inspired by his or her aspirations, learning from his or her responses to the program as a whole, and taking pleasure in envisioning future projects. But advisors need to be conscious about limiting their time commitments in such a way that they are not overburdened. A physically and psychologically exhausted advisor is no help to anyone.

Advisors should offer a specific window of time for meetings appropriate to a clearly formulated goal. If undertaken in a goal-oriented way, most planning tasks can be completed in 20-30 minutes.

The following is a list of student support resources for students. Advisors should keep in mind the limits of their own competence to help their advisees and direct students to seek information and support from these resources when appropriate.

### Financial Assistance

Students in need of information and support about financial assistance (Bafög, scholarships, loans) can be directed to one or more of the following resources:

- **Studierendenwerk Freiburg-Schwarzwald**  
Website: <http://www.swfr.de/geld/finanzielle-hilfen/>  
Contact: Claudia Heineman, SWSF, Room 01011 Sedanstr. 6. Telephone: 0761/2101-253. Email: [heineman@swfr.de](mailto:heineman@swfr.de)  
Office Hours: Tuesday 9:00-12:00 and Thursday 13:30-16:00 and by appointment per telephone.
- **Service Center Studium – Stipendienberatung**  
Website: [www.studium.uni-freiburg.de/studium/stipendien](http://www.studium.uni-freiburg.de/studium/stipendien)  
Contact: Service Center Studium, Sedanstr. 6. Info Hotline: 0761/203-4246. Email: [stipendienberatung@service.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:stipendienberatung@service.uni-freiburg.de).
- **Stipendium Plus**  
Website: <http://www.stipendiumplus.de/>
- **Deutschland Stipendium**  
Website: <http://www.deutschlandstipendium.de/>
- **DAAD**  
For international students seeking funding for study in Germany:  
<https://www.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/en/>

### Social and Legal Counseling for All Students, Health Counseling for International Students

Student in need of information and support for social and legal issues (e.g. insurance, immigration law, tenancy law) or international students needing help navigating the German health system can be directed to the Studierendenwerk.

- **Studierendenwerk Freiburg-Schwarzwald**  
Website: <http://www.swfr.de/beratung-soziales/beratungsstellen/>  
Contact: Infoladen des Studierendenwerks, Schreiberstraße 12-16, 79098, Email: [info@swfr.de](mailto:info@swfr.de),  
Telephone: 0761/2101-200  
Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 9:00-17:00.

### Psychotherapeutic Services

Students in need of information or support about psychological health can be directed to one of a variety of services, depending on the kind of issue (chronic or acute, personal or study related, etc.).

- **Studierendenwerk Freiburg-Schwarzwald**  
Individual counseling appointments  
Website: <http://www.swfr.de/beratung-soziales/beratungsstellen/psychotherapeutische-beratung/>  
Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9.00 - 12.00 and by appointment with Rosa Meyer, SWFS, Schreiberstr. 12, Room 003, Tel. 0761/2101-269, Email: [r.meyer@swfr.de](mailto:r.meyer@swfr.de)

The Studierendenwerk also offers seminars about coping with stress, exam nerves, writer's block, etc. (full program online: <http://www.swfr.de/veranstaltungen/seminare/>)

- **Nightline**

Website: [www.nightline.uni-freiburg.de](http://www.nightline.uni-freiburg.de)

Peer support (via phone) offered by students in Freiburg. Daily 21 pm -1 am  
Tel. 0761/2039375 or Skype: nightline.freiburg

- **Frauenhorizonte e.V.**

Support for students who experience sexual harassment or abuse

Contact: FRAUENHORIZONTE – Gegen sexuelle Gewalt e.V.

Baslerstr.8, 79100 Freiburg Tel. 0761/2858585, Email: [info@frauenhorizonte.de](mailto:info@frauenhorizonte.de)  
[www.frauenhorizonte.de](http://www.frauenhorizonte.de)

24 hotline for emergencies (rape, coercion, sexual harassment): 0761/ 2 85 85 85

Office Hours: Mo-Th 9.00 to 18.00, Fr 9.00 to 16.00

- **Ambulanz der Psychiatrischen Uniklinik**

Emergency appointments: Telephone (0761/2706550)

### **Counseling for Victims of Violence and Crime**

Students who have been victims of violence and crime can be directed to the Weisser Ring.

- **Weisser Ring**

Website: <https://www.weisser-ring.de/internet/>

Hotline: 116 006

### **Study Abroad**

The best starting point for information and support for students interested in study abroad is the International Office. They offer monthly information sessions and individual support by appointment or walk in. Students can also speak to our own Anne Klemperer for information about LAS-specific exchanges.

- **International Office**

Website: <https://www.international.uni-freiburg.de/>

Contact: Christine Kutnar, Study Abroad Advisor, Student Service Center, Sedanstr. 6, Room 02 023.

Telephone: 0761/203-4227. Email: [christine.kutnar@io.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:christine.kutnar@io.uni-freiburg.de)

Office Hours: Tuesday 13:30-15:30 by appointment by email and Thursday 9:00-11:30 walk in.

- **Anne Klemperer**

[klemperer@ucf.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:klemperer@ucf.uni-freiburg.de)

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