Responsibilities and Skills for Becoming a Great Advisor

Being an advisor is, arguably, one of the most important responsibilities as a faculty member at Cornell. For many students, you are one of the main knowledgeable contacts as they navigate the college experience. For many, this is their first time living away from home, and you provide an anchor as they figure out how to function independently, learn in a new environment, and engage in coursework that will define their professional identity and success. You are your advisee’s advocate on campus when they face challenges. Besides academic advising, our advisees see us as mentors, counselors and confidants, and it is up to us to uphold that image.

The CALS Committee on Support of Teaching and Learning offers the following tips and suggestions:

Personal

• Personal touch matters! Know the names and interests of your advisees so that you can make friendly and informed inquires about their lives and progress.
• Show interest in their academic goals and aspirations, listen to their anxieties and worries, and find the information necessary to solve their problems or help them find someone who can.
• When advisees come for your signature, spend a little time asking them how they are doing in their courses or life at Cornell in general.
• Send congratulatory e-mail messages when they do exceptionally well.
• Invite them to meet with you when they need help.
• Attend student events/programs/activities like faculty-student mixers, get-togethers, club events or performances, poster sessions, etc., to relate to their activities and be a visible presence in their lives beyond the classroom or lab.
• Encourage your advisees to attend campus events to get the most out of Cornell.
• Encourage your advisees to participate in student clubs (CALS: http://cals.cornell.edu/campus-life/student-organizations; Cornell: http://orgsync.rso.cornell.edu/) and other extracurricular activities. And
encourage them not to overdo it on activities and clubs, at the expense of classwork, but to find a comfortable balance.

• Invite your advisees to dinner at one of the campus houses or in your home.

• Be alert to identify students whose academic performance and/or emotional well-being is causing you concern. If any students have not been attending and/or submitting assignments for reasons unknown to you, please contact the CALS Student Services Office for follow up. The university has provided us with an online Caring Community form where you can also report your concern. This online form will route your concern to the proper Student Services Office (as your concern may be about a student that is not in CALS). You can access this form at https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php?CornellUniv&layout_id=6

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• Work together to develop a roadmap of course work for the duration of the student’s program. This roadmap will help them understand the requirements of the major, avoid last minute surprises, and help them plan if they want to minor in another field, take extra courses of interest, or spend a semester abroad.

• Send your advisees email reminders before important dates, such as pre-enrollment, and encourage them to meet with you about any questions and concerns.

• Monitor progress toward their degree at the start of each semester.

• Be knowledgeable about departmental and college policies, procedures, and resources relevant to advising.

• Participate in advising workshops made available by the college or the major/department.

• Discuss opportunities that allow students to engage more deeply in their education, careers, or civic responsibilities through opportunities such as undergraduate TAs, research, internships, fellowships, study abroad, pre-med, honor programs, Public Service Center, science outreach, etc.

• Help your advisees to make a smooth transition when changing majors.
• Be familiar with the “CALS Four-Year Academic and Career Advising Action Plan” at

Availability and Communication
• Inform your advisees your policy for meeting with them (with or without
  appointment), and how you prefer to be addressed.
• Respond to the student’s e-mail messages as soon as possible. They may be
desperately waiting for your advice.
• Needless to say, keep your appointments.
• Inform your advisees if you are travelling for a long period of time (especially
  sabbatical) and arrange a temporary advisor for them in your absence.
• Everyone needs somebody sometime for something!