INFORMATION FOR PARENTS, FAMILIES & GUARDIANS (2013 version)
The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences • Alfred University

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These FAQs for parents and guardians of new students serve as a supplement to the Alfred University Parent Handbook with some particular information for parents of students within the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. In keeping with Alfred University’s philosophy on parents as partners articulated in that handbook (p.2.), we are dedicated to supporting your sons and daughters to “become independent thinkers and self-advocates” as they explore the many educational opportunities available to them and “take responsibility for their own learning.” One of the most important relationships for your sons and daughters as they begin their academic journey within our College is the one they will develop with their faculty academic advisor.

Who is my student’s academic advisor?
In the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS), each student is assigned a faculty advisor upon entering the college. Advisors are full-time faculty members within one of the academic divisions within the College. Each has gone through advisor training and many have had years of experience as academic advisors. Advisors usually send a letter or email to students over the summer and meet individually with new students during orientation week to become better acquainted.

How is my student’s academic advisor selected?
We match up advisors with students based on what we know of students from their brief essay, their areas of interest, and some of the personal information they have provided us on the Advising Questionnaire sent to them from the Dean’s Office.

How do I know who my student’s advisor is?
Students were notified of their faculty advisor when sent the new student registration packets. We hope that students have had some exchange with their advisor prior to coming on campus. We encourage you to ask your student about his or her faculty advisor. Parents also have the opportunity to meet the advisor during Orientation Week prior to the Parent Orientation meeting.

What does academic advising involve?
Within CLAS we understand advising as an extension of teaching and it is a valued responsibility for all our faculty members. Faculty members perform their advising duties with the same level of care and attention given to teaching and scholarly work. Advisors are responsible for reviewing with students their responsibilities for meeting all graduation requirements. Students have a reciprocal responsibility: to be informed about AU requirements and deadlines and to keep their advisor informed about their personal, intellectual and career interests. The advising relationship is a partnership and will benefit from open conversations and questions from both partners. Advisors help students to think about how they might fulfill both personal and academic goals while at Alfred. They encourage academic exploration; prompt students to think about new learning opportunities (e.g., study abroad, internships, service learning); talk with students about their academic challenges and successes; refer students to various resources and support services on campus; and help students think about balance among academic work, jobs, and extra-curricular activities as well as a balanced plan of study.

Advisors are the go-to academic liaison for students, especially in the first-year. Does your student have a question about what to expect academically from college courses? Perhaps he or she is struggling with a particular course and is not sure what to do: an advisor can remind a student about the availability of tutoring, encourage the student to meet with the instructor, or can help a student think through whether a course should be dropped (and what the consequences of dropping a course might be). These are the kinds of questions and concerns for students to discuss with their academic advisor, especially as they are adapting to college-level courses and expectations. As students progress through college, the advisor can assist them with making choices about a major, an internship, a career path, or graduate school. They can also discuss supports such as tutoring, counseling, and other related services on campus that can contribute to a student’s success. Advisors assist students by helping them to reflect on what they enjoy in their classes, or even what they may not be crazy about. Each of these discussions impacts a student’s goals and decision-making. You can help by encouraging your student to talk with their advisor about their ambitions as well as their uncertainties.

Does the faculty advisor tell my student what courses to take?
One of the major roles of an academic advisor is to help a student think about course planning. Advisors assist students with selecting courses each semester that will engage them intellectually as well as meet some of our degree requirements. Advisors do not make choices for students, but guide them in the process of exploring alternatives and becoming self-directed. Students are ultimately responsible for making their own decisions as well as for fulfilling degree requirements.
How often does my student meet with his or her advisor?
We encourage students to meet frequently with their advisor so that their relationship and communication can grow over time; the better an advisor knows a student, the better he or she can advise your student. In general, we expect first-year students to meet with their advisor at least three times a semester. A good guideline is one meeting to get acquainted and discuss personal and professional goals; one meeting at midterm to discuss the next semester’s courses and progress up to the mid-term point; and one toward the end of the semester before finals to reflect on the previous semester and talk about things that may need adjustment for the upcoming term. We also encourage informal encounters throughout the year between students and advisors. Students are encouraged to invite their advisors to activities they may be part of, for example, a sporting event or a performance.

How does my student contact his or her academic advisor?
Most advisors give students some sense of their availability, posting or advertising office hours or asking students to email them for appointments. Some advisors have drop in hours or open office hours; others like students to schedule appointments in advance, and some have a combination of both. When in doubt about how to arrange a meeting, students could a) drop by their advisor’s office; b) go by the Division Office to find out the advisor’s availability; or c) email their advisor about making an appointment. We also encourage students to send an email notice to their academic advisor if they are in a performance on campus, participating in a sports competition, or are involved in another campus or community event. Our faculty members enjoy the accomplishments of our students and relish invitations to see them perform or compete.

What if my student’s advisor is not in the field he or she wants to major in?
Advisors are trained to help first-year students think broadly about their education and to explore their interests and follow their curiosity. Faculty advisors encourage students to think about a range of majors and can refer a student to another faculty member for an informational interview about a particular major. Some students will end up declaring a major in the field in which their faculty advisor specializes, retaining their first-year advisor as their major advisor. Other students will declare a major in a different area and will have an opportunity to choose a new faculty advisor from that field.

What if my student does not have a productive relationship with his or her advisor?
While we hope that students will develop meaningful relationships with their faculty advisor, sometimes the chemistry isn’t right. Generally we want students to stay with an advisor for at least one semester (three meetings) to see if the relationship gels. Students may request a change of advisor by completing the Change of Advisor form available from the Dean’s Office in 201 Seidlin. Students unsure about a change, the process to change, or who to change to are welcome to meet with one of the deans in 201 Seidlin to discuss options available to them.

Can I contact my student’s advisor if I have concerns?
You are welcome to contact the advisor or any University office for guidance in supporting your student. However, we encourage you to try to let your son or daughter solve their problems on their own. Time in college offers many opportunities for students to learn, both inside and outside the classroom. Allowing your student to look at alternatives and make decisions will be an invaluable skill when he or she graduates. Encourage your son or daughter to directly contact the advisor, instructor, or support service on campus that may be able to provide guidance, answers or support. If you do contact your student’s advisor or another office on campus, please understand that unless a student has signed a release allowing us to share information with their guardian, we are limited in what we can say in conversations with parents. (See p. 4 of the AU Parent Handbook.)

What will my student study during the first year in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences?
If your student is a first-year student, he or she will be taking a First Year Experience (FYE) course; if a transfer student, then your student will enroll in the Transfer Seminar. In addition to this mandatory FYE or Transfer seminar, most students will take one or two writing courses in their first year, as writing is one of the critical foundations for student learning in our College. Your student will be encouraged to take courses that help him or her to explore multiple interests while meeting degree requirements. Some students may have selected a major based on a limited understanding of which majors can help them to reach their goals, so it is helpful for them to take an introductory course in a particular field before finalizing decisions about a major. There are many routes to the same goal. For example, a student who is interested in the environment could pursue a major in Environmental Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Global Studies or Biology based on his or her special interests. The academic advisor can help a student think about these options.

What is an FYE class?
The FYE Program gives every first-year student the opportunity to participate in a small seminar taught by one of our outstanding professors. These seminars help integrate students into the Alfreed community as well as familiarize them with the expectations and opportunities of a liberal arts education. Each FYE class has an associated Peer Leader, who is an experienced and well-informed CLAS student.

What academic challenges might my son or daughter face in the first year of college?
Although the freedom that comes with college can be exhilarating, sometimes students are unsure about how to manage their academic responsibilities along with their free time. **Time-management is one of the biggest challenges for first-year students.**
students. If your son or daughter plans to play a sport, perform in a show, or engage in another extracurricular activity or take on a job, we suggest that you encourage your student to write out a tentative schedule for the first weeks of the semester. At the end of one of those first weeks, talk with your student about their schedule. Did your student budget enough time for schoolwork? Get enough sleep to feel well rested and alert during classes? Most students underestimate the amount of time that they are expected to devote to their studies outside of class. We tell students that they should allow for at least 3 hours of study time per week for each hour in the classroom. Most students are in class about 15 hours a week, so that translates to 45 hours of study. Yes, students need to think of their studies as a full-time job!

First-year students often find that the study skills and habits they used in high school are not adequate for the college environment. If your son or daughter is struggling with tests or assignments, it might be a good time to talk about study habits. Encourage your student to talk with his or her advisor or instructor about how to study or improve. Suggest that your student go to an instructor’s office hours to go over a test or a paper to better understand the material and course expectations. Many students miss out by not taking advantage of the open invitation to go to the office hours of an instructor; such conversations can really make a difference. Our faculty wants to help students succeed. What we most often hear from students who have an unsuccessful semester is that they are afraid to ask for help because they want to do it on their own. Students are losing out on a critical resource for their learning and success if they do not take advantage of meeting with instructors outside of the classroom. If your student is struggling in all of his or her classes, he or she should go talk with the academic advisor; together they might be able to determine what resources might best help a student: tutoring, counseling, special academic services, etc.

Can I help my student by preparing his or her schedule, registering them for classes, or editing their papers?
We know that parents are eager to help their students succeed and make a smooth transition to college. The first year can be especially stressful as students are not only adjusting to the academic challenges that college brings, but are also dealing with living away from home, sharing a room with a new person, and taking on personal chores that at home might have been done by a parent or shared by other members of the household (e.g., laundry, meals, schedules, etc.). As a parent, you may be tempted to edit your son’s or daughter’s paper or offer them tutoring in a subject area that is particularly challenging. Try to resist this temptation and suggest that your student take a paper draft to the Writing Center or attend group tutoring offered by the Math Division or sign up for one-one-one tutoring through Special Academic Services. Students will learn best and be well-supported by drawing on these customized resources at the University. Similarly, the Banner system we use at Alfred is a great resource for your student; the sooner your student can become familiar with this system, and its ins and outs, the better informed they will be about their educational options, schedules, and grades. If you are registering your student for classes, he or she will not learn how Banner works. Students also need to become familiar with Blackboard; most courses have syllabi and related course materials posted on Blackboard. The CLAS Dean’s Office has also created a Blackboard course that contains a lot of helpful information for students (we normally send this information out to students via email, but we store the forms, announcements, policies, applications, etc., in Blackboard so students can access the information even if they have deleted the email). Among our many educational goals is to help our students move towards independence and self-sufficiency; you can partner with us to support your student in achieving self-confidence and self-reliance by letting them take initiative and responsibility. Encourage them to make informed decisions, to take responsibility for their decisions, and to learn from the consequences of poor decisions.

How is my student kept informed about events, deadlines, opportunities, and resources?
Email is the official method of communication to students on campus, in addition to Alfred Today (on the AU website). Students are responsible for checking their email on a regular basis and for the important information communicated in those emails, including various deadlines and policies. While texting, Facebook and other social media communication hubs may be the preferred and regular means of communication for your sons and daughters, you can help by reminding your student to check their Alfred email on a regular basis. Students can arrange to direct their AU email to one of their other email hosts so that they get all their emails in one place; this may be a good idea so they do not miss important announcements that come via their AU email. Students are also required to be familiar with the AU Undergraduate Academic Regulations and degree requirements, which are found on the AU website.

When can my student choose a major?
Students choose their major in consultation with their faculty advisor as well as with other faculty members and mentors who may help them finalize a decision about a major. A student may begin taking courses required for a major at any time, but until a student completes and submits to the Dean’s Office the “Major Declaration” form, he or she has not officially declared a major. Students can declare their major at any time, but must have chosen a major by the end of the sophomore year.

What if my student wants to change majors?
It is not unusual for students to change their mind about a major. The advisor or another faculty mentor is a great person for your son or daughter to go to and discuss such a change. The advisor will help a student think about why the current major is not working or what has changed about a student’s interests. An advisor can be a good sounding board to help a student make an informed decision about such a change. Depending on when students change the major, what major they change to, and how
many courses they have already completed toward the current major or the new, proposed major, students may require an additional summer or semester of coursework; this would be important for your student to review with an academic advisor.

I know my student would make a great lawyer (or be a great doctor); how can I encourage my student in this direction?
Parents, aware of their children’s special gifts and talents, often are eager to push a student in a particular direction or toward a specific career path. This is understandable. But our children often discover things about themselves and our world in college that may cause them to aspire toward something other than what we think most suitable for them. We often find ourselves counseling students who find themselves conflicted about satisfying the goals of their parents when their own dreams are different. Students do not want to disappoint their parents, so they often try to achieve both their own goals and those of their parents; this can lead to undue stress and lack of success towards both goals. Studies show that student success in college is tied to their abilities to develop their own reasons for being there; self-motivation is critical. As your sons and daughters learn more about themselves and their options through the college experience, encourage them to talk with you about what they are exploring, about what motivates them, excites them, what they feel confident about, and what brings them a sense of accomplishment. It may be helpful to know that a student does not need to major in a particular subject area to go onto med school, law school, or a particular career. Faculty members, advisors, and our excellent Career Development Center staff can help students think about how to best present their skills and interests to potential employers or grad programs. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that adults are changing careers multiple times in a lifetime and our students may be going into jobs and professions that don’t even exist at this time. A strong liberal arts education, which our College offers, will provide your student with multiple skills and a knowledge base that will be useful in many different professions.

What if my student wants to pursue two majors or a minor?
Many students in CLAS pursue minors and some choose to complete majors in two areas. While all students must fulfill requirements for one major, as part of the CLAS degree requirements, minors and multiple majors are optional and really depend on a student’s interests and schedule. We suggest that students sketch out a multi-year academic plan on paper to see how they might fit in requirements for multiple majors or minors and then share this with their advisor for review. As noted above, and reaffirmed in much of the higher education literature including surveys with employers, normally a particular job does not require a particular undergraduate major (there are Fortune 500 CEO’s who majored in English and philosophy and many doctors who majored in theatre or music, and lawyers who studied science); similarly, multiple majors do not necessarily translate to more job offers. Students should think about their reasoning for pursuing multiple majors and be confident that this is the right choice for them.

What if my student wants to transfer to another school within Alfred?
From time to time students do transfer within the colleges at Alfred; there is an application associated with this process. Students should have an initial discussion with their advisor about their interest in pursuing the degree offered by one of Alfred’s other colleges. Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the requirements of the other AU colleges if they are thinking about an internal transfer. Some of the other AU schools have specific requirements that must be met prior to transferring to that school. All students in CLAS who want to transfer to another AU college meet with the Assistant Dean of CLAS to go over the process for internal transfers and to answer questions students might have about such a transfer.

It may be helpful to know that students may pursue a minor offered by any one of the four colleges without being in that college. For example, many students in CLAS who are thinking about becoming middle school or high school teachers minor in Education while pursuing a major in the area they would like to teach, e.g., History, Math, or Biology. Some of our students choose to pursue one of the minors offered by the Business School to prepare them for particular careers they may want to pursue. Others may choose the minor in Art History offered by the Art & Design School just because they love the subject matter. CLAS students do have opportunities to take courses in other AU colleges to enhance their educational experience here.

May my student supplement his or her AU education by taking courses at Alfred State or at other colleges during winter break or summer?
There are some courses at Alfred State College (ASC) not offered at AU that may be of interest to your student. Alfred University is part of a consortium with ASC and some other regional colleges that allows for cross-registration in a course at another college. Students should consult the AU catalog and their advisor about this opportunity before completing the Consortium cross-registration form. There is an application to study elsewhere form that must be completed and submitted prior to taking courses at another institution, if a student wishes to have these credits transfer toward their Alfred degree. This form, as well as the Consortium Cross-Registration Form, is available from the Student Services Center and should be completed in consultation with the student’s advisor.

Further Questions?
This information sheet provides some preliminary Q&A’s that we think might help you in partnering with us and your student as they pursue their aspirations and education within the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. We also refer you to the resourceful AU Parent Handbook for additional information. Please encourage your sons and daughters to ask additional questions of their advisors or to pose them to the Dean’s Office as we work together to support them on this significant journey. We welcome hearing from you: phone: 607-871-2171; email: lasdean@alfred.edu.