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 CLAS. 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, a career, 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. 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 and for meeting all 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.

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 be studying in 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 to the Alfred community as well as 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. If your son or daughter plans to play a sport, perform in a show, or engage in another activity, we suggest that you encourage your student to write out a tentative schedule for the first week. At the end of the week, talk with your student about it. 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 want 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.

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?
The advisor or another faculty mentor is a great person for your son or daughter to go to and discuss such 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.

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.

What if my student wants to transfer to another school within Alfred?
From time to time students do transfer within the colleges at Alfred. Students should have an initial discussion with their advisor about their interest in a major in 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. 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.

Further Questions?
This flyer 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 as well.