

Advising at a distance in uncertain and challenging times

Advising at distance will bring new challenges and opportunities for the rest of spring 2020. In concert with the college's framework for advising competencies ([Adviser's Handbook](#)), we offer you these advising strategies appropriate for our current situation.

Nuts and Bolts

Policy changes to the S/D/F grading and course withdrawal deadlines. These options are now available to students until Friday, April 10. See the [email of 3/25 from the Office of the Registrar](#) and this [guidance document to students](#) about weighing their course enrollment options; use these to communicate with your advisees.

New tools. With students away from campus, we encourage you to learn the Webex video conferencing tool for speaking with your advisees. It can be used on a computer, phone or other device. Because it uses the internet for both audio and video – provided your student has internet access – it is free to students both domestic and international; thus, students won't need a phone or need to use minutes on their phone. In addition, because sometimes communication systems fail – if you're comfortable – consider exchanging phone numbers to be able to reach each other in the case of bad internet or software being temporarily unavailable.

Academic Planning

Stay attuned to students' four-year plans. We are striving to not have the circumstances of this semester negatively impact students' ability to graduate on time. Still, there may be unforeseen issues that cause changes in your advisees' four-year plans. Be attentive to students who request to withdraw from classes or who are demonstrating academic difficulty, and, in these situations, use the 'Program' tab in Self-Service to see if your advisee will remain on track. Don't hesitate to verify your assumptions about students' degree progress with the Office of the Registrar or with Academic Advising. As always, we welcome the opportunity to partner with you on individual student situations.

Technique

Given the distance and situation we're facing, consider the following as you adjust to new ways of communicating with your advisees.

- ***No more chance encounters, so be intentional.*** You won't bump into your advisee in the hallway of your building with them beaming about an 'A' on their latest paper or sad

because their internship fell through. So, be as deliberate as possible in reaching out and inviting advisees to connect with you. Begin now. You may have already reached out to your advisees (as Kathy Jacobsen did to hers in [this helpful email message](#)), but, if not, we recommend you do so very soon.

- ***New circumstances; be compassionate.*** This is a situation that we are all living through, so you will naturally approach your advising with significant empathy. But don't assume you understand your students' situations. In your communication (whether email or by voice), ask your students about their home and life there. Be curious and kind and allow a few minutes to connect as people.
- ***Choose your words carefully in email.*** Language choice matters for influencing decisions students make, for motivating them, and for caring about them. Use language that presumes competence and agency of the student. Express that you want to partner with the student, not impose your wisdom on them. Choose words that show an awareness of our collective challenges. Share a bit of your personality in your writing to be 'real' with them, too. For example, instead of, "I see you got an APR in math. What is going on? Do you want to talk?" consider, "Learning from a distance is a massive shift for all of us. I am sorry that the last math exam didn't go well. Knowing you, you're doing all you can to manage the situation you're facing, but I would be happy to talk with you about how the class is going and possibly brainstorm new strategies with you. I have some 'virtual' office hours through Webex on Thursday this week. Would you call in so we can visit? It's not the same as in person, but it would be great to see your face. I can also arrange a time to talk with you that works better."
- ***Create and publicize your 'virtual' office hours including a simple mechanism for signing up.*** Some faculty and staff use Outlook (the College's official calendaring application) to allow students to sign up for meetings. By keeping your calendar up-to-date you can ask students to send invites when they want to meet, or use the scheduling assistant [FindTime](#), which integrates into Outlook. Some faculty and staff use [Calendly](#) to allow students to sign up for meetings. (Note from ITS: If you use Calendly, do not to enter sensitive information into scheduling requests or appointments; only designated [FERPA Directory Information](#) can be included.) Why do this? Both Outlook and Calendly minimize emails back and forth, which is essential in a time when inbox clutter can be even more overwhelming.
- ***Try to connect by voice/video.*** Students may prefer email, but suggest voice (phone or Webex) or even video to them. We all will send a lot of email this semester, but through a voice/video conversation you will learn much more, and more quickly, especially for discussing complicated situations. We especially encourage you to use Webex or other video/voice platform for your pre-registration meetings. With this format you can see non-verbal signals that can be helpful in fully understanding what the student is trying to communicate to you, and it enhances a sense of connection which is critical for wellbeing and belonging during this tough time. Students don't have much, if any,

chance to casually 'chat' with their faculty. Allow the first few minutes of your conversation for that and don't immediately "get down to business."

- **Be flexible.** These are trying times for all of us, so as much as possible allow your students to call the shots in terms of what method of communication is going to work best for them and be accommodating. If all they want/can do is email, at least they are staying in touch.
- **Keep using your resources.** The office of Academic Advising (advising@grinnell.edu) continues to serve as a main point of contact for you in your concerns about students. More about this and the APR system coming soon. We want to partner with you on your students' success, as always.

Thanks to Kathy Jacobsen, professor of biology, for allowing us to post [her exemplar email](#) on the Advising in Practice site, and to the following individuals for their helpful comments on this document: Tim Arner, associate dean of the college, Gracee Wallach '20, SGA vice president for academic affairs, Michele Regenold, senior content strategist, and Dave Robinson, chief information officer,.