

Advising Special Student Populations

Every type of student population has different characteristics and often times specific needs so it is important for advisors to understand and consider these when working with our students.

Advisors cannot take a cookie-cutter approach when working with different student types so it is important to get to know and understand the needs of each advisee to provide guidance and support that will best fit their needs. Below are some special student populations and some tips to remember when working with that particular student population.

Transfer Students

- ❖ Transfer students have experienced the “college experience” one or more semesters elsewhere but will not know the specific policies and procedures of our institution.
- ❖ Transfer students may have worked with a different Student Information System (SIS) other than Banner so they might need some direction on how to register and navigate through the SIS and Griffon GPS.
- ❖ A report is run after each registration program to identify students who are currently enrolled in a course in which they are transferring in credit; some students choose to repeat a course to try to earn a better grade or to have a better understanding of the course material.
- ❖ Missouri Western typically accepts transfer credit from regionally accredited institutions. However, Missouri Western does not generally accept technical or vocational credit, unless the student declares the Bachelor of Science in Technology degree. For concerns on whether coursework will transfer, please contact the Admissions Office at 816-271-4264.
- ❖ A student has the right to appeal a denial of transfer credit at MWSU. The student should contact a transcript evaluator in the Office of Admissions to address their concern and discuss the appeal process.
- ❖ MWSU accepts unlimited lower division transfer hours (100-200 level) from regionally accredited two-year colleges. However, some degrees require 60 hours from a senior college.
- ❖ Students who have completed an Associate of Arts degree (AA), a bachelor’s degree, or the Missouri 42-hour general education block (must be noted on the transcript or other official document) from a regionally-accredited institution, is considered to have satisfactorily completed Missouri Western’s general studies requirements (some exceptions apply which will be evaluated on a course-by-course basis). Completion of general studies requirements does not waive departmental major pre-requisites.
- ❖ A transfer student who has completed any other degree will have their courses evaluated on a course-by-course basis.

- ❖ The Missouri Department of Higher Education has established the Missouri Higher Education Core Transfer Curriculum (CORE 42 MOTRansfer) which is a forty-two semester credit hour statewide general education curriculum designed to ensure that all graduates possess a common core of college-level skills and knowledge. For more information on the CORE 42 curriculum and how this can benefit transfer students, go to this link: <https://www.missouriwestern.edu/registrar/core42/>.
- ❖ Missouri Reverse Transfer Program is the process of allowing college students or former college students who have completed credits for an associate's degree to receive that degree even if they have transferred to a different college or university, or dropped out of higher education altogether.
- ❖ Refer to the document titled *Reminders when working with transfer students* which is also located under this tab.

Adapted from Admissions website, Missouri Western State University. Website: <https://www.missouriwestern.edu/admissions/transfer/>

First Generation Students

- ❖ First generation students are defined as students not having a parent who graduated from college with a baccalaureate degree.
- ❖ They think of going to college as their only chance to “make it out” or to “break the cycle”; there is much pressure and stress on them to be the first in their family to obtain a degree in higher education.
- ❖ They feel the pressure to succeed but do not know the resources that can help them do so.
- ❖ It is important to develop and build a trusting relationship with their advisor; open communication is key to this relationship.
- ❖ First generation students often have little family support and guidance; family obligations can be obstructive and cause student to feel guilty about attending college; sometimes they can receive pressure from family and friends to come home.
- ❖ They often times do not know what to expect in college so they don't anticipate the roadblocks and obstacles that students sometimes face.
- ❖ Advisors need to encourage them to use available resources to succeed (Center for Academic Support, Student Success, Counseling Center, etc.)
- ❖ It becomes very important to discuss scholarship available; discuss the importance of debt management with the student; direct them to visit with trained Financial Aid personnel.

- ❖ Help them establish not just academic goals but personal goals to support their academic objectives, and hold them accountable for reaching these goals.

Sickles, A.R. (2004). Advising first-generation students. Retrieved from the *NACADA Clearinghouse of Academic Advising Resources*
Web site: http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/1st_Generation.htm

Exploring/Undecided/Transitioning Students

- ❖ These students often feel guilty for not having a decision made on their major. It is important to provide support, while giving direction in their exploration of finding the career and major that best fits their needs, values, interests, and skills.
- ❖ It is important to have them do career/major exploration early to provide direction and guidance in their decision.
- ❖ Direct students to meet with staff in the Career Development Center for career exploration by completing a personal assessment.
- ❖ Advisors can encourage these students to do some of the activities from the “Helpful Steps in Exploring/Deciding on a Major” document in this section. There are some helpful websites available on this document to aid in their exploration and provide information regarding salaries, certification and licensure requirements, etc., for different careers.

Underprepared/At-Risk Students

- ❖ At-risk students are likely to display characteristics such as “low academic self-concept, unrealistic grade and career expectations, unfocused career objectives, extrinsic motivation, external locus of control, low self-efficacy, inadequate study skills for college success, a belief that learning is memorizing, and a history of passive learning” (Walsh, 2003).
- ❖ Can be a student who has made a poor choice or decision in the past that had a negative impact on their academic experience; can be an adult who is returning to school after stopping out; can be a student with limitations (academic or physical) that have never before been identified prior to coming to college.
- ❖ Advisors need to foster the student’s development of self-confidence and provide guidance as they learn how to make sound decisions.
- ❖ Collaborative relationships with other departments are important when working with these students, encouraging the student to “gain a sense of belonging and that they matter” (Miller & Murray, 2005).

- ❖ It is important to remember to focus on their strengths and provide encouragement as they develop their abilities and skills to become successful students.
- ❖ Use proactive/intrusive advising strategies such as:
 - Utilize assessment tools (ACT, SAT, Accuplacer, etc.) to understand the student's abilities and skill level;
 - Use open-ended questions such as 'What subjects did you enjoy studying in the past?' and follow up with 'What methods did you find successful in studying this subject?' to get the student to share what has worked for them in the past;
 - Identify the student's strengths, as well as their skill deficits;
 - When working with the student to design a plan to overcome their skills deficits, be direct, empathic and prescriptive;
 - Mix courses that meet the student's current skill level with course options in areas of previous success;
 - If possible match the student's learning style with the teaching style used in the course (if known); use caution when recommending these students to take online courses at the early stages of their academics;
 - Determine the best time of day for their learning process – are they a morning person?
 - Help them set short-term and long-term goals, along with developing the action plans to help them achieve these goals;
 - Introduce support courses (UNV 101 and Griffon Edge) and resources (Center for Academic Support) that create support structures;
 - Discuss with them the importance of regular class attendance and meeting assignment deadlines;
 - Provide positive encouragement and feedback when appropriate;
 - Stay in close contact with the student; obtain their cell phone number and encourage them to check their MWSU email daily to stay apprised of activities and special events on campus, as well as respond to requests made by financial aid, instructors, advisors, and other campus representatives requesting information.

Probationary Students

- ❖ Advisor should initiate communication to the student (by letter or email) requesting them to come in for an appointment early in the semester; follow up with a phone call if student doesn't respond.
- ❖ Be clear to the student that your goal is to help them with their academic situation.
- ❖ Get to know the student and discuss what circumstances were in place that could have caused them to be put on academic probation. Sometimes students are not open to share or share very little; sometimes helps to share personal information on how advisor struggled in their academics.
- ❖ Once the issue/problem is discussed, work out a plan of action to aid in their academic recovery. If the issue is out of the advisor's expertise, refer student on to the appropriate resources on campus that are skilled in handling these matters (Counseling). It is important for the advisor to follow up on any referrals made to the student.
- ❖ Helps students determine their positive strengths and what they enjoy doing; student may need to explore different careers and majors that will utilize their strengths and interests.
- ❖ Meet regularly with these students to talk about their career and major interests, how they are doing academically, how things are going outside of the classroom (socially), and help keep them motivated and know that someone cares about their success and believes in them.

Cruise, C. (2002). Advising students on academic probation. Published in *The Mentor* on October 28, 2002. Website: <http://www.dus.psu.edu/mentor>

First-year Students

- ❖ Many times this is the first time the student has been away from home, on their own, so newfound freedom is exhibited. It is very important to help these students set their priorities and goals early to avoid setting bad habits.
- ❖ These students do not know the Student Information System (SIS) nor the processes, policies and procedures so it is important for advisors to be very explanatory when working with these students.
- ❖ Tinto (1993) outlined the three stages that students move through in their first year:
 - Separation where they move away from their home environment; can be a traumatic experience for them.

- Transition is a time when the student is torn between finding their place in their new environment and feelings of not belonging in their old environment.
- Incorporation is when the students feel like they have achieved a full membership with regard to the social and academic community of their institution.
- ❖ Students also need to feel that they are appreciated and belong so it is important for advisors to be supportive and connect with these first-year students to help them feel a sense of belonging.
- ❖ Getting students engaged in clubs, organizations, or activities in the college community is an essential part of helping first-year students succeed. This enables them to connect with others of similar interests and make friends. To encourage students to get involved have them look into the clubs and organizations available through the Center for Student Involvement at this link: <https://orgs.missouriwestern.edu/>.
- ❖ UNV 101 is a great course to recommend for first-year students to get them acclimated to the institution, the university's policies and procedures, as well as getting them engaged, and helping them with study skills and time management skills. This course involves goal setting, critical thinking, diversity, and advisement and degree planning.

Astin, A.W. (1985). *Achieving educational excellence: A critical assessment of priorities and practice in higher education*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

Non-Traditional Students

- ❖ The definition of this student varies but the nation-wide definition is a student who is 25 years or older.
- ❖ Sometimes single-parent students feel like they are within this population of students, even if they are not yet 25 years old. They have family obligations that can cause them to miss classes due to a sick child or emergency with their child.
- ❖ Adult students are sometimes challenged with the technology that is expected of students and require additional guidance to be successful. In this case, it is best to avoid online classes until they are more confident and adjusted to the demands of technology.
- ❖ Most non-traditional students are working, sometimes full-time jobs. They are often juggling a full plate with school, family obligations, and work.
- ❖ Some non-traditional students started college as a traditional student right out of high school but didn't take the experience seriously and didn't do well. If you work with an advisee who is a returning student with these circumstances, please offer the option of the Academic Renewal Policy. This policy is available under the following circumstances:
 - Allows current students who have not earned a previous degree to request adjustment of overall GPA and credit hours earned;

- Student must not have been enrolled in university coursework for five or more consecutive years;
- Must have completed two or more consecutive semesters at MWSU with requirements on credits and grades earned;
- Student must go through a Petition process detailing academic and professional experiences and accomplishments.

For more information on Academic Renewal, contact the Registrar's Office, 816.271.4214.

Veteran Students

- ❖ All transfer courses from the military will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine the equivalency. Veteran students must provide their DD 214 or Joint Service Transcript for this process.
- ❖ Terms to know:
 - DD Form 214 – the certificate of release or discharge from active duty. Most will refer to it as simply DD 214 and accompanies a service member's separation from active duty.
 - GI Bill – this refers to any educational benefits earned by a service member. There are several different programs and specific requirements for eligibility with each.
 - MOS – Military Occupational Specialty code is how veterans label their specialty. What they did during their service could provide beneficial in their academic career too.
 - POCs – Points of Contacts
 - Service Connected Disability – a permanent injury sustained while on active duty. There is usually compensation for this disability.
 - Voc Rehab – Designed for veterans who have service connected disabilities that prevent them from performing their military job as a civilian. Can provide tuition, book and a stipend to those who qualify. Cannot be combined with other GI Bills. Is meant to retrain veterans for civilian work.
- ❖ Important contacts for veterans:
 - Missouri Western State University School Certifying Official in the Financial Aid Office, Eder 103, 816.271.4507.
 - Center for Military & Veterans Services, Eder 202, 816.271.4111.
 - Counseling Center, Eder 203, 816.271.4327.

NACADA Webinar: *Soldiers to Students: Academic Advising for Returning Veterans*. 2014.

Student-Athletes – see separate document under this tab

International Students – see separate document under this tab

Honors Students – see separate document under this tab

Transfer Students – additional information available under this tab

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