Preparing to Meet with Your Advisor Before Spring 2015 Registration

It is almost time to begin registering for Spring 2015 courses. There is information elsewhere in this Newsletter about the logistics of using SIS to complete the process and some advice about how to minimize the crunch on the morning you can begin to register. But prior to this, you need to meet with your advisor to discuss your plans, and then she will lift the “Registration Advising Hold” on your account. While we hope that you are in touch with your advisor throughout the year, it is important to touch base with your advisor before course registration to take stock not only of your progress in meeting degree requirements, but also of your progress in meeting your broader educational goals at CWRU.

It takes two people to have a conversation. You should prepare for your meeting with your advisor. One part of that preparation is to put courses in your shopping cart in SIS so that your advisor can review your plans for the coming semester. Beyond that, you should be prepared to explain your choices. Some courses may be there because you have no choice; they are part of a required sequence in the major. Others are selections that you have made among a variety of choices, but reflect your interest in particular aspects of the major; the more your advisor knows about your interests, the more she can help you. Some course choices may reflect interests outside of your major, and it will be good for your advisor to understand the broader context in which your major falls. If you are pursuing more than one major, we only require that one of your advisors lifts the advising hold, but you should discuss your academic plans with each of your advisors to make certain that you are on track and that they know your plans. (And, if you have decided to drop one of the majors, do the paperwork and drop it!)

While we require some interaction between you and your advisor around course registration, course selection may be only a small but focused part of the advising conversation. Your advisor is also someone who can help you navigate the University more broadly. She will want to know your long-term career goals so that she can help you think about how best to prepare and also call special opportunities to your attention, such as events related to your interests or fellowship and job opportunities. She will also want to hear about the ups and downs of your experience at CWRU in order to help you connect with other resources on and off campus. And hearing about positive things will help her advise other students with the knowledge of courses, activities, and resources that have been particularly helpful.

Of course, as the conversation moves beyond course selections within a particular major, you may be going beyond your advisor’s particular areas of expertise. She might suggest that you seek advice or information from others. This is exactly what we expect in an advising relationship. Case Western Reserve, like all other colleges and universities, is a complex institution. It is hard for anyone to be expert in all aspects of the institution. But you should think of your advisor as a hub within the CWRU network of people and offices who can support your experience here. When your advisor suggests that you meet with someone else, be sure to report back on what you learned. You may find that you receive seemingly contradictory advice from different sources. Your advisor can help you sort through the information you received and make sense out of it. I often tell advisors that some ways in which they can be especially helpful to students are to rehearse the conversation you need to have with someone else so that you are sure to ask the right questions, and then to help you review and process what you have learned.
My colleagues and I in Undergraduate Studies sometimes hear criticism of advisors who point students to others for information rather than knowing the details themselves. I encourage you to see these referrals to others more knowledgeable about a specific topic as a strength of our advising system, with the expectation that your advisor will fill the role of being a hub (though not necessarily the only hub) for guiding your experience at CWRU.

*Let me know what you think. You can write to me at jeffrey.wolcowitz@case.edu.*