So what do the Undergraduate Studies deans do anyway?

Welcome to our new transfer students and welcome back to continuing students! All of us in Undergraduate Studies hope that you had a summer that struck a good balance between productivity and relaxation before the start of the new academic year.

As we start the new year, I thought it would be helpful to address a question that I often hear from students: What does a dean in the Office of Undergraduate Studies do? The short answer is that we do many things, both direct and indirect, to help you have an outstanding academic experience at CWRU.

First, a question for you: Do you know who your Undergraduate Studies dean is?
Answer:  
New transfer students during your first semester: Claudia Anderson  
Last names beginning A through D: Nancy Dilulio  
Last names beginning E through K: Scott Hardy  
Last names beginning L through R: Greg Harris  
Last names beginning S through Z: Denise Butler

Undergraduate Studies is responsible for the academic side of the student experience here. We work with all undergraduates, regardless of whether you choose a major in Arts & Sciences, Engineering, Nursing, or Management. While the faculty and academic departments in the separate schools offer classes, majors, minors, and degree programs, Undergraduate Studies sits across the schools, providing a common experience as you make decisions about which academic path to pursue. We are the constant in your life, with responsibility for registration and enrollment issues (your comings and goings from the University and individual courses, if you will) and for monitoring your academic progress, both at mid-semester and at the end of the semester. If you are unable to attend class because of illness or another documented emergency, your dean can write to your faculty. If you wish to enroll in more than 19 credit-hours (though 14-17 credit-hours is the normal enrollment level!), you should discuss it with your dean. You should also discuss other special requests related to enrollment and deadlines with your dean. We may need to point you elsewhere for certain issues or for documentation, but we are always a good place to start.

Your dean will also be the person monitoring your overall academic progress, reaching out to you if your mid-semester grades raise concern or if you fail to meet the University’s academic standards at the end of the semester. Don’t wait for your dean to contact you. Reach out to him or her if you are not satisfied with your performance. He or she can help you with strategies for improvement and help you connect with appropriate campus resources. Or your dean can simply provide a good sounding board as you try to sort things out. Your dean will also be the person to certify your completion of requirements for graduation. Work with your dean to make sure that your Academic Requirements report is accurate and reflects any course substitutions approved by your advisor. Don’t assume that AR discrepancies are “SIS errors” that will somehow be corrected when you are ready to graduate. Plan ahead and work with your dean.

Each of the deans also has other functional responsibilities for the office that take up a good chunk of their time, but their most important role is to help you make the most of your academic experience at CWRU. In reviewing the description that I provided above, I realize that it tends to focus on transactions and problems. It is important to remember that, like your advisor, your dean wants to help you thrive
here and become prepared for a productive life after college. I often say that the Undergraduate Studies deans can be your advisors of first and last resort: the first place to turn when you and your academic advisor are not sure how to pursue a particular matter, and then the place where you return, having exhausted all options, for help thinking about how best to re-group and move forward. Come in just to chat. They want to get to know you, and the more that they know about you, the more they can help connect you with appropriate opportunities.

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