RA Academic Advising Handbook 2007-08

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ACADEMIC ADVISING RESPONSIBILITIES OF RAs

As Resident Assistants, you have a general responsibility for helping students “enjoy a satisfying…educational life at Carleton.” You are in a position to interpret the College to students, to notice when their lives seem less than satisfying, and to refer them to the help they may need. Students will often ask your opinion and advice, and they will take it seriously. Your major responsibilities as an RA is to be well informed about these matters and to be objective yet personal in helping students as they pursue their Carleton education.

Understanding your role: Remember that although effective advisers are supportive, give honest feedback, and provide accurate information, they do not take responsibility away from the students they work with. Each student must ultimately assume full responsibility for:

- Choosing courses, major and programs
- Formulating academic goals and making decisions
- Doing the work
- Satisfying requirements and meeting deadlines
- Using the resources available

Responsibilities of all RAs

In your capacity as an academic adviser, we expect you will:

1. Become familiar with the major sources of academic information, especially the Academic Catalog (http://www.carleton.edu/campus/registrar/catalog/) and Academic Regulations and Procedures (http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/dos/academic_regs/). Be sure you are always using accurate information and that others know where to find it.

2. Assist students with problems that may be affecting their academic performance. Personal issues – relationships, poor health, alcohol abuse, etc. – need to be dealt with carefully, but you can be helpful by describing the behavior you see.

3. Refer, refer, refer. You are often the first person a student will see, but you don’t need to be the last. You don’t need to know all the answers, but you do need to know where to find answers. Get students to utilize the many resources listed in the Directory for Advising. Of particular importance for academic advising:
   - Class Deans
   - Academic Support Center
   - Faculty Adviser

If you have suggestions to make about the academic advising system, advising materials, or in-service training for advisers, talk with the Senior Associate Dean of Students, Bruce Colwell, or Associate Dean of the College, Elizabeth Ciner. We welcome your suggestions.
Responsibilities of RAs Advising New Students

RAs living with or assigned to new students carry additional responsibilities and play a more direct advising role. We expect you to:

1. Conduct the first meeting with new students to orient them to what they need to know about the curriculum, academic requirements and advising during the first week, and review their fall term schedule (see below for detailed recommendations on the first meeting);

2. Prepare them for their first meeting and appointment with their advisers by helping them plan their course selection; thereafter, assist them during Advising Days each term before they meet with their advisers in preparation for registration and offer to review their schedules at the beginning of each term;

3. Discuss and interpret academic regulations as the occasion requires (e.g., drop/add, changing sections of courses, preparing for the end of the term);

4. Be aware of your advisees’ living habits and approach to college work; take an active role in talking and offering constructive options if you think problems or ineffective habits may adversely affect their academic work;

5. If a new student talks about leaving school, discuss the options with them and encourage the student to talk with their faculty adviser or Class Dean.

First Meetings with New Students

Faculty Advisers, Orientation Leaders, Intercultural Peer Leaders and Resident Assistants all meet with first year students during New Student Week. Some information will overlap and advice may conflict, but assure new students that with good information, they are in the best position to make their choices.

The following checklist should serve as a guide to what you cover:

1. Describe briefly the advising system, your role, and the faculty advisers.

2. Remind them about placement tests and answer the questions you can. Refer to the pages on placement and testing in this handbook for detailed information.

3. Encourage them to use their Carleton Academic (CAP) Planners.

Encourage them to start on distribution requirements to explore new areas and to work for a balance in types of courses, workloads (daily assignments vs. term papers) and interests. Explain minimum and maximum loads (12-22 credits) and suggest a normal load of 18.

If you have an opinion, express it, remembering that ultimately the student will decide what to do. Your perspective is valuable. Refer them to SDAs for departmental information, and most importantly, get them to begin thinking about their programs.

Let them know you care about what they do and will check with them after they start classes.
Implications of Common Academic Options

Two of the most common academic decisions facing students are whether to elect the non-graded (S/Cr/NC) option, and whether to Drop Without Penalty (DRP) a course after the second week of classes. The following information may be helpful as you advise students:

S/Cr/NC (See “S/Cr/NC Option” in the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook available on-line at http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/dos/academic_regs/)

1. Purpose
   - Allows students to experiment with unfamiliar areas of study.
   - May permit students to give a course less priority with minimum risk. The policy allows some time to assess how a student is doing but does not require that evaluation be available before choosing the option.

2. What it means
   - The symbol S means work of C- or better; Cr represents a D of any level. So, for example, a student earning Cr in a foreign language earns credit but may not go on to the next level.
   - Courses in a student’s major cannot be taken on a S/Cr/NC basis. Courses taken to fulfill specific college graduation requirements (e.g. distribution, writing and language proficiency and RAD) must be passed with a grade of S or C- or better.

3. Possible issues
   - Students may discover that they did very well and would have liked (or needed) the good grade.
   - Students may underestimate the work required to earn a D grade (Cr) and in misjudging, fail the course (NC).
   - If students should have to retake a course in which S/Cr/NC was elected, the retake must be done on a graded basis.

4. The effect on grade-point-average depends on the circumstances:
   - no negative effect if the student has an adequate GPA;
   - can help improve GPAs if students know they can do better work in the other two courses carried on a graded basis;
   - may adversely affect GPAs for students who have borderline or low GPAs and need graded credits; this is especially true if the student could earn a C or better in each course, which would improve the GPA.

5. The effect on transfer, graduate or professional schools:
   - most require transfer grades of C or better. The Cr at Carleton represents D- level work and thus, will probably be interpreted as not meeting the minimum grade required by another school;
   - too many S/Cr/NC courses may make it difficult for schools to evaluate a student’s transcript and GPA fairly – perhaps to the student’s disadvantage;
   - many graduate schools review both the major and overall GPA;
   - some professional schools have specific ways of incorporating or excluding work done on a S/Cr/NC basis; consult with the campus advisers (pre-law, health professions, Career Center), for information about this.

DRP (“Dropped Without Penalty after 2-week drop/add/period”)
The DRP is a descriptive grade signifying that a course was dropped after the end of the prescribed drop/add period.

Dropping too many classes may result in an overall academic deficiency in required credits, however dropping one or two courses, especially in related fields, may not be detrimental to a student’s record.

In deciding to drop a course, students should be advised to consider:
- Whether making an extra effort and getting assistance (talking with the instructor, tutoring) might help them pass instead. Sometimes 6 credits of D are better than falling behind in credits.
- Overall progress. Will this put them near minimum credits for terms completed? Has Academic Standing Committee required them to take and pass 18 credits?
- Students must carry at least 12 credits.
- May remove possibility of taking a lighter load in the future.
Academic Standing Committee

Memberships, Functions, Actions, Academic Review

The following information had been prepared for academic advisers, student leaders, and others who may be in a position to advise students about the Academic Standing Committee and its functions.

MEMBERSHIP:
Faculty: 3 members TBD
Administrators (also the ASC sub-committee): Roger Lasley, Elizabeth Ciner, Joe Baggot, and Bucky Zietz
Students: Lauren Jarocha and 2 students TBD

FUNCTIONS:
The Academic Standing Committee is chaired by a faculty member and coordinated by the Associate Dean of Students.

The Academic Standing Committee (ASC) deals with the application and interpretation of and exceptions to academic regulations and policies. (See “Academic Standing Committee,” “Petitions” and other specific sections in Academic Regulation and Procedures, available online at http://webapps.acs.carleton.edu/campus/dos/academic_regs/). The administrative sub-committee handles most “routine” petitions, with the full committee serving as an appeal board when necessary. Another sub-committee on exemptions for foreign language requirement also makes its recommendations to the full committee.

The full committee
a) considers petitions for readmission, foreign language exemptions, special majors, 13th Term and referrals from or appeals of the sub-committee
b) hears academic dishonesty cases
c) recommends policy changes to the Educational Policy Committee (EPC)
d) conducts academic review after each term (see below)

The Administrative sub-committee considers all petitions for registration, status and grade changes.

ACTIONS:
In general, the committee tries to balance concerns for an individual student’s circumstances with the need to maintain institutional standards and to apply regulations equitably. The committee assumes that students have taken the responsibility for familiarizing themselves with all published academic information and have attempted to manage it in a responsible way.

Typically the committee
• returns petitions that are inaccurate, incomplete or lack sufficient information for the committee to give fair consideration;
• approves petitions that merit exception due to verifiable extraordinary circumstances, and routinely all petitions received for double majors, overloads, and off-campus study and internships;
• denies petitions for summer school (unless student is deficient in credits), grade option changes, removal of DRP from transcript, and underloads (fewer than 12 credits).
END OF TERM ACADEMIC REVIEW:
The purpose of academic review is not simply to maintain the standards of the College, but more importantly to warn students whose level of work places them in jeopardy of being dropped for lack of progress in credits or fulfilling requirements and low grade-point average.

a) Students subject to review
- those under review by action of the committee at the end of the previous term;
- those who had withdrawn/term amnesty or had been suspended by the ASC and have just completed their first term back;
- those whose cumulative record show that they are at or below the minimum progress required in GPA or credits, or who had a poor term for fewer than 12 credits or under 2.0 GPA

b) Actions taken
- Informal Letter of Concern: an alert for a minor or developing problem, such as a D in a required course. Parents are not notified.
- Letter of Concern: warning for approaching minimum standards or a poor term or failing grade.
- Place on Review: indicates student is in serious difficulty with grades or credit progress, and usually requires something from the student, such as take and pass 18 credits, maintain a 2.0 or better average, or submit a term by term plan. Although students can be suspended at anytime for poor performance, students not satisfying review “conditions” will likely be suspended from the College

c) Notifications
All students are informed by letter of the committee’s action, told about the process and requirements set by the committee, and given advice about resources available and, occasionally, remedial actions to take.

Copies of those letters are also sent to the student’s faculty adviser, parents, and the Director of the Academic Support Center.