

# Advising Tips

## When You Interact With A Student Who Has A Disability.....

1. Ask if the student has any special needs or concerns about his/her academic life. Listen to these concerns. It may be helpful to summarize what you heard the concern(s) to be.
2. Make notes and prioritize the action that is needed. Encourage the student to participate in that process and make a copy for themselves.
3. Discuss how they learn best. Some students will need more direction than others in analyzing their strengths and weaknesses. (Our office continually works on developing this skill with students.)
4. Develop a "balanced" course load based upon the above information. For example, if a student has difficulty writing, only select one or two courses which may require extensive writing. The student will be able to handle writing one research paper a semester, but may not be able to handle two or three courses which will require a major paper. On the other hand, if a student has difficulty with math, be careful to select only one course, which will require a significant amount of math ability. An unbalanced course load for this student would be calculus, accounting, and economics. The student will be able to pass each of these courses individually, but there will be an undue strain to complete it all in one semester.
5. Some students, who have physical challenges or learning disabilities, may find that four courses is a full load. If advisors are sensitive to the individual needs of the student, it will help the student gain confidence and take more responsibility for his/her academic success.
6. Help students who have difficulty with organizing material or with sequencing make a list of forms and procedures that they need to complete. Ask them to recap what they need to do before they leave your office.
7. Students with disabilities do not want to be discriminated against or pitied. In general, students are private and carefully choose those people they can trust. Your confidence is essential in maintaining a good working relationship.
8. Treat a disabled person as a healthy person. Because an individual has a functional limitation does not mean that the individual is sick. Some disabilities have no accompanying health problems.
9. Talk directly to a disabled person, not to someone accompanying them. For example, if a deaf person is with an interpreter, talk to the deaf person, not the interpreter.
10. Advising the disabled student is largely a matter of common sense. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the student to make a reasonable academic plan. It is helpful to remember that they are students first and disabled second.