

FOSTERING  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT  
SUCCESS:



A GUIDE FOR FACULTY ADVISORS

WCU Advising Center

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# FOSTERING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT SUCCESS:

## A GUIDE FOR FACULTY ADVISORS



# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW

This is a guide to advising for faculty advisors at Western Carolina University. The purpose of the guide is to provide necessary information about policies, procedures, programs, and best practices in advising, all packaged in a convenient, searchable, digital format.

In addition, this guide also offers perspectives on effective advising and opportunities for you to pursue continued professional development as an advisor.

Following this overview, the guide is divided into four primary sections, each of which features an overview of the major issues facing students, a set of policies and guidelines, case studies, and related resources.





## OVERVIEW

- Division of Student Success
  - Dr. Lowell Davis, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Student Success
- Units in the Division of Student Success
  - Related units
- Finish in Four
- Why Advising?
- The Advising as Teaching Model
- The Advising Relationship

## The Division of Student Success

Welcome! It is indeed my pleasure to introduce you to the Division of Student Success. Over the past six months, we have dedicated time and resources to ensuring student success is at the forefront of everyone's mind here at Western Carolina University. Undergraduate Advising has become the major tool at WCU that provides an arena for student success and retention.

In an effort to know where we are going as an institution, it is important to focus on setting goals and objectives. We live in an ever-changing world that is technology based, which suggests that success in the future depends upon the knowledge that is acquired through training and education. To that end, the Advising Center has developed this electronic advising manual to assist faculty and staff in guiding students to "Finish in Four".

This manual, through careful planning and implementation by the Coulter Faculty Commons and the Advising Center, will provide a panoramic view of the charge that we have before us. It is imperative that we as faculty and staff continue the cycle of providing resources to help our students succeed.

My charge to you is that you use this manual as a resource in helping students reach their goal of graduating.

Respectfully,

Lowell K. Davis, PhD  
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Success

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## Units in the Division of Student Success

- **The Advising Center**

- The Advising Center offers comprehensive academic advising to undeclared and declared undergraduate students at Western Carolina University. The Center provides a holistic approach to advising by addressing students' academic and social potential. Advisors help students to select proper courses, to choose careers and appropriate majors, to understand university academic policies and procedures, and to cope with the transition to college.

- **Student Support Services**

- A unit within the Advising Center, Student Support Services provides students who are first generation, low income, and/or students with disabilities with academic advising, mentoring, one-on-one tutorial support, and workshops focused on career, financial aid, and graduate school preparation.

- **The Office of Disability Services**

- The Office of Disability Services is a voluntary program for students with documented disabilities designed to ensure the receipt of necessary accommodations and equal treatment in all areas of campus life. Students are encouraged to be active in the determination of accommodations.

- **First Year Experience (FYE)**

- Aims to foster a holistic approach that will empower students to succeed as they transition to college life and discover a passion for learning.

- **The Writing and Learning Commons (WaLC)**

- The WaLC provides free small-group course tutoring; one-on-one writing tutoring; individual academic skills consultations; and online writing and learning resources.

- **The Mathematics Tutoring Center (MTC)**

- The MTC provides tutoring support in mathematics and related courses.

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- **The One Stop**

- A centrally located service center that makes it quick and convenient for students and parents to conduct university related business involving financial aid, Cat Card activity, Registrar, cashiering, and general student services.

- **The Registrar's Office**

- The Registrar's Office fosters student success through the management of the University's student information system. In close partnership with other academic units the Registrar's Offices owns or oversees; publication of the academic calendar and university catalog; the schedule of classes, classroom scheduling, room reservations and final exams scheduling; registration, grading, and academic standing, graduation and student records; the degree audit, transfer equivalencies and transfer articulation; transcript services, enrollment certifications and enrollment verifications.
  - Most direct student services are provided through the OneStop. Questions about registration and degree audits are best directed to faculty or professional advisors.

- **Summer Session**

- Attending Summer Session offers students multiple opportunities with the benefit of helping them reach graduation on time or even early. Smaller class sizes, a lighter course load than fall and spring semesters, focusing on one or two classes instead of juggling many – these are just a few of the excellent reasons for students to attend Summer Session.

## **Related Units**

- **Career Services and Cooperative Education**

- Assists students with finding non-work study students employment, choosing a major and career path, identifying internships, creating job search documents, and securing employment after graduation.

- **The Center for Student Learning**

- Connects students, faculty, and staff with service opportunities in the region and supports the University's commitment to civic engagement.

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- **Coulter Faculty Commons**

- The Coulter Faculty Commons for Excellence in Teaching & Learning at Western Carolina University serves full and part-time faculty and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in all areas of teaching & learning. The Commons seeks to provide one-stop service for faculty.
- The Commons goal is to create an environment where faculty come together in the spirit of creativity, collaboration, and community, where becoming an ever better teacher or mentor is the most significant and recognized achievement that any faculty member can seek and where students have superior learning opportunities and experiences.
- The Commons designs activities and consultations to spread excitement for the scholarship of teaching and learning. We want WCU faculty to know and experience themselves as part of a teaching and scholarly community where there are continuous open discussions and support for teaching and scholarly activities, where senior faculty remember why they first became teachers, where junior faculty seek excellence in teaching and research, and where new faculty and GTAs experience a wise and compassionate teaching internship or apprenticeship.

- **Teacher Recruitment, Advising and Career Support (TRACS)**

- The mission of the Teacher Recruitment, Advising and Career Support unit (commonly referred to as TRACS) is to develop a college-wide system of support by centralizing the functions related to recruitment, preparation, induction, and professional development for teachers. TRACS also seeks to promote a seamless continuum for the ongoing development of professional educators. As part of the College of Education and Allied Profession's efforts to support our students from recruitment through the beginning years of teaching, we have established a centralized office for all support services. Advising and outreach for CEAP has grown in recent years as we work with faculty and students in undergraduate, graduate, residential, and online programs. Student (and beginning teacher) success is our mission and we feel strongly that Suite 201 inside the Killian Building is a welcoming and bustling place for students to come for services, meetings, and even just to hang out.

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## FINISH IN FOUR

The Finish in Four initiative is Western Carolina University's pledge to provide students with the resources and guidance necessary to finish their undergraduate degree in four years. In Finish in Four, we seek to provide students with a clear roadmap for success and the tools necessary to realize their dreams.

Utilizing available tools and resources and in consultation with their professional and faculty advisors, students will outline the courses they need to successfully complete their degree program. The plan will account for Liberal Studies courses, major courses and their appropriate sequencing, concentrations and/or minors, and any electives needed to reach the minimum number of hours required for the specific degree program. The Finish in Four Plan should also allow students to intentionally plan for summer sessions, study abroad opportunities, service learning, internships and externships, and other curricular and co-curricular opportunities.

### **What's new for advisors and students in the Finish in Four initiative?**

Effective fall 2014, the Finish in Four initiative will put policies in place that are intended to keep students moving forward toward graduation:

#### **Withdrawal Policies**

- Students may withdraw from a maximum of 16 hours of courses during their career at Western Carolina University. Any withdrawal beyond the limit will result in a Withdrew-Failing (WF) which will affect the semester and cumulative GPA as if it were an F.
- University withdrawals will affect satisfactory academic progress and course completion rates but will not count towards the student's 16-hour course withdrawal limit.
- After 60% of the term has passed, students are not allowed to withdraw from a class and the instructor must assign a grade.

#### **Grade Replacement Policy**

- Students may repeat a maximum of 16 (up from 15) credit hours. When a student repeats a course, only the most recent grade will be used in calculation of the student's grade point average and counted in the hours toward graduation. However, all grades shall remain on the student's transcript.



## Academic Standing Policies

- In addition to earning and maintaining acceptable grade point averages, students are also required to successfully complete at least 67% of their attempted semester hours.

For detailed information on these policies, please review the Academic Regulations section of the Undergraduate Catalog: [catalog.wcu.edu](http://catalog.wcu.edu)



For a humorous look at what a Finish in Four plan should NOT look like, click on this link, [four year plan](#).

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## WHY ADVISING?

Research in higher education indicates that the primary reason students succeed in their undergraduate studies, regardless of level or institution, is the relationships they build with others, from friends to faculty. The primary relationship that serves as the foundation of that success is that between the student and his/her academic advisor.

There are many myths and misconceptions surrounding the advising experience.

- **Myth 1: Advising primarily involves giving out registration PINs.**

- Most faculty receive little to no formal training as advisors. For many of us, the models we were exposed to as undergraduates, which often only contained the exchange of PINs, serve as the foundation for our understanding of our role as advisors.
- Providing information and giving out PINs is only one aspect of advising. In many ways, it is the smallest and least significant step. Since most of us were enrolled, higher education has undergone several fundamental shifts. One of the most profound of these has been the move towards a student or learner-centered paradigm, which resulted in a concomitant shift in the nature of academic support, including advising.
- The dominant model for understanding academic advising today is often deemed “advising as teaching”. This latter model draws on the existing expertise and experience of faculty members and brings that to bear on the advising experience. Under this model, in many ways the advising experience serves a critical role in integrating the knowledge the student has gained into a meaningful, cohesive, and directed whole.

- **Myth 2: Advising is for professional advisors only.**

- There are several fallacies in this statement. Professional advisors are just that, professionals, and they are specifically trained to be effective at advising students. The Advising Center is often the first place students encounter academic advising and, as such, sets expectations for the advising that follows. Professional advisors should definitely play a significant role in the advising experience, especially in the transmission of information about university policies and standards, and there is significant overlap in the roles of professional and faculty advisors. That being said, professional advisors do not have the depth of expertise in your field, including the pedagogy, the prospects, and the perspectives that



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underlie that field. This is where the role of the faculty advisor is distinctive and important. Effective advising is a partnership between professional advisors, faculty advisors, and university administration.

• **Myth 3: Advising is not worth the time**

- Effective advising does take time, but it also conveys numerous intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.
  - To be able to share directly in student success can provide a profound sense of meaning to what we do as faculty members.
  - A strong advising relationship can deepen and continue well after a student has graduated.
  - It can also help you to better understand not just your advisees, but your students in general, which can, in turn, facilitate stronger teaching and learning in your classroom.
  - Quality advising is considered a critical institutional priority and directly affects graduation and retention rates.
  - Faculty should expect to be evaluated, recognized, and rewarded for the work they do as quality advisors.

## THE ADVISING AS TEACHING MODEL

Researchers who study advising suggest that you can think of academic advising as consisting of three inter-related aspects: bookkeeping, counseling, and teaching (Lowenstein, 2005).

- **Advising as Bookkeeping** -This perspective places the advisor's primary job as making sure that the student has checked off all the necessary requirements to make it through to graduation. This aspect of advising constitutes the baseline—the minimum goal to be reached. In this case, the role of the advisor is primarily to provide specific information and to enforce guidelines.
- **Advising as Counseling** -This developmental model posits the advisor's role as contributing to the student's personal development, including maturity, confidence, and responsibility, not unlike the role played by a Counseling center today. This view of counseling is likely familiar to many of us, as until recently it had been the dominant paradigm. This model depicts the role of the advisor as a person who engages in guided and meaningful dialogue with individual students.

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- **Advising as Teaching** -This model suggests that we should apply the same perspectives and best practices to excellent advising as we do to teaching. Advising should engage the student in its own curriculum and do so in ways that are intentionally designed to maximize student academic outcomes. As one researcher states it, an excellent advisor does the same for an entire curriculum that the excellent teacher does for one course. (Lowenstein, 2000).

This latter model draws on the existing expertise and experience of faculty members and brings that to bear on the advising experience. Under this model, in many ways the advising experience serves a critical role in integrating the knowledge the student has gained into a meaningful, cohesive, and directed whole.

## THE ADVISING RELATIONSHIP

According to the faculty handbook, faculty advisors should expect to have between 20-33 active advisees at any given time. Research has demonstrated that this is a reasonable number given faculty workloads in other areas. This number may or may not include inactive students, i.e. those who have been suspended, withdrawn, or otherwise left the university. At a minimum, the advising relationship consists of the following interactions:

1. Advisor assignment
2. Introductory Meeting
3. Advising Meeting/Advising Day
4. On-Going Communication
5. Application for Graduation

### Step 1: Advisor assignment:

**Professional advisors** are assigned by the advising center based on the intended major indicated by the student in [CatWalk](#). CatWalk is the pre-registration web application students complete prior to Orientation. In addition to the Advising Center, students are assigned to professional advisors in Student Support Services, the Honors College, and TRACS (Teacher Recruitment, Advising and Career Support in the School of Teaching and Learning).



Student Athlete are assigned to the Student Athlete Advisor in the Advising Center.

**Faculty advisors** are assigned when a student has declared a major. Most faculty advisors are assigned by their department head.

For faculty advisors, the official list of advisees can be found in My Cat.

#### STEPS TO ACCESSING THE ADVISEE LIST IN MY CAT

- Log in to My Cat
- Select Personal Services tab
- Select Advisor Tab
- Select Advisee Listing from the Advisor Menu
- Select Term
- Your Advisee List will be displayed.
- You will be able to link to the following information available on your Advisee Listing:

<i>Advisee Listing</i>													
Student Name	ID	Advisor Type	Alt PIN	Info	Photo	Holds	Scores	Trnsct	Audit	Acad Prog	Enrl Ind	S/P	Graduation App

- Student name in alpha order, last name first.
- Student ID.
- An envelope icon that opens an email to the selected student.
- Advisor Type
- The Alt PIN number
- Student information including curriculum
- Link to student Photo

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- Holds
  - Test Scores (SAT, AP, etc.)
  - Transcript
  - Degree Audit
  - Academic Progress Reports
  - Enrolled indicator
    - ~ indicates not enrolled
    - x indicates enrolled previous/future term
    - X indicates enrolled current term
  - S/P for suspension/ probation status
  - Graduation Application

**Department communication regarding advising varies — please note that you may or may not be told directly when a new advisee has been assigned to you.**

Students do have the right to request a different advisor should they find the initial assignment unworkable, but whether or not these requests are granted is at the discretion of the department or unit head.

### **Step 2: The First Meeting**

Most faculty advisors meet with their advisees for the first time in their office. While this is conventional, it is not required. You can also meet in a public place or through virtual conferencing (software available through Coulter Faculty Commons). Some advisors even like to meet their advisees over a meal or coffee.

The cornerstone of the advising relationship is listening. Listen closely to what the student has to say. Below are some suggested responses that indicate active listening.



1. Restate (e.g. “what I hear you saying is....”)
2. Summarize (e.g. “let me see if I am understanding what you’ve said so far...”)
3. Reflect (e.g. “that issue seems to be bothering you a great deal...)
4. Label (e.g. “so it sounds like you are finding this issue frustrating...”)
5. Probe (e.g. “Can you say more about that?”)
6. Validate (e.g. “I know that this is difficult for you to discuss...”)
7. Redirect (e.g. “I’m not sure we’re getting anywhere on this issue, what about...?)
8. Give feedback (e.g. “I think there may be some things we can do to address this...)
9. Show consequences (e.g. “What happened the last time you tried that...”)
10. Stay silent

Some common topics for a first meeting, according to the different advising models.

• **Model 1:**

- Go over the requirements and 8 semester plan for the major.
- Be sure they understand how to use the Banner Degree Audit function in relation to major requirements.

**HOW TO RUN AND INTERPRET A DEGREE AUDIT/EVALUATION**

1. Log on to your MyCat account here: <https://catamount4.wcu.edu/cp/home/displaylogin>
  - a. Choose the Personal Services tab, then the Advisor tab.
2. Choose the Degree Evaluation link.
3. Select and submit the current term then choose Generate New Evaluation at the bottom of the page.

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4. Select the anticipated graduation term and program, then generate request. This may take a few minutes. If the anticipated graduation term is not on the list, just select the latest option.
  5. At the top of the evaluation, you will see student details, Major, and Minor. Under this, you will see the overall completion summary followed by the program completion summary.
  6. If you continue to scroll down, you will see your detailed program information including which courses have been taken in the major, and which courses remain to be taken.
  7. Next is Concentration/Minor information, Liberal Studies requirements, and General Electives
  8. At the end is the 25% Rule status for residency, currently enrolled courses, and courses not used.

#### HOW TO RUN A WHAT IF ANALYSIS

1. At the bottom of the Degree Evaluation, choose What-If Analysis.
2. When using the “what if” analysis you first need to select a year. This is usually the current term.
3. You will then select a major area of study.
4. When you hit continue it will again ask you to confirm the area of study. It is **IMPORTANT** that you hit “Add More” to change a concentration or minor.
5. You will be prompted to select a concentration next. If the program you are interested in does not have a concentration, then hit “Add More” once again.
6. For the last step you will be prompted to select a minor. You may not have a “second minor” for the major you are interested in, so you may simply click “Submit” at that time.
7. The degree audit that will display the new program requirements.

**REMEMBER – the what if analysis is just a simulation! Students will need to go to the Advising Center to change their major.**

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- **Model 2:**

- Ask your advisee questions so that you can get to know them better. What are their living arrangements like? Why did they choose WCU? The more you understand your advisees, the more effective you can be at matching them with potential opportunities in the future.
- Talk to them about what they expect from the college experience as a whole. What are their hopes, fears, aspirations, challenges, etc. for their college years? What do they like to do outside of class?

- **Model 3:**

- Be sure they understand what is expected of them, and of you, in the advising relationship. Professional advisors in the Advising Center, for example, share a syllabus with their advisees ([syllabus](#)). Faculty advisors can also create advising contracts or syllabi for their advisees.
- Talk to them about potential career options. It's not too early, depending on the advisee, to have them start looking more deeply into these options.

Be sure to ALWAYS take notes about what you have discussed and to add those notes to the student's record

### **Step 3: Advising Meeting/Advising Day**

Every fall/spring semester, the university schedules advising day. You can find out when advising day is by consulting the official university calendar accessible on the Registrar's Office [webpage](#). Advising day is always scheduled to fall when the schedule of classes for the upcoming semester is available, usually October in the Fall and February in the Spring. Please note that the spring advising day will also cover summer classes.

On the scheduled advising day, students should expect to be advised and you should expect to be available to advise them. If for some reason you are not available that day, you should make alternative arrangements available as soon as possible and inform your department head.

Prior to advising day, it is recommended that you communicate with your advisees and let them know how you will handle scheduling appointments for the day. Some faculty simply place a printed schedule on their office doors and ask their advisees



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to sign up, some use scheduling software such as Doodle — there are many options. The professional advisors use Grades First to schedule appointments electronically.

Because you are meeting with as many 25 students in one day, these appointments will likely be shorter than other meetings with your advisees. These will be focused on advising students regarding what courses they will register for in the upcoming semester and providing the students with the Alt PIN they will need to complete their registration.

Here are some Advising Day tips from experienced advisors:

- You can ask students to create a draft schedule in advance. This saves time and helps teach them about how scheduling works.
- Ask good questions that get at the information you need efficiently. For example, “tell me two things that worked for you last semester and two things that didn’t...”
- You can offer group sessions if you have topics that cross over multiple advisees. You can also provide an information sheet, or FAQs, if there are things you find yourself repeating quite often.
- If you have time, confirm your advising day appointments with your advisees the day before. This helps cut down on missed appointments.
- If you have trouble putting together names and faces, you can look up photos of your advisees in My Cat on your Advisee List.
- If you have already created a Finish in Four plan with the student, this can be very helpful in determining course selection for individual semesters. If not, this would be a good time to offer the student suggestions on creating their plan that could be discussed at a follow up advising session.

#### **Step 4: On-going Communication**

It helps to set communication expectations early on in the advising relationship, either as part of an advising contract or syllabus, or through other written communication. You can view an example of an advising syllabus [here](#).

- What are the appropriate means that your advisees can use to contact (phone, text, email, social media, etc.)?

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- What can your advisees expect in terms of your communication? How quickly will you respond to their requests? How often can they expect to hear from you?
  - Are there any limitations on their communication with you (e.g. no calls after 10 pm)?
  - Do you have any expectations as far as the professional level of their communication with you?
  - Similarly, it is also helpful to set expectations regarding advising meetings.
  - Do you require the students to make appointments or can they just drop in, or drop in during certain times?
  - If the former, what do they need to do in order to make an appointment for advising?
  - How often can they meet with you? Daily? Weekly? Monthly?
  - What should they expect to bring with them to the meeting? Is there anything they need to do in advance prior to the meeting?

Some communication tips from experienced advisors:

- Set limits. Many students come from a different generation in terms of communication and they often expect 24/7 response unless you tell them otherwise.
- Send/forward regular communications to your advisee list regarding upcoming opportunities, etc. Even if they don't avail themselves of these opportunities, they often appreciate hearing from you.
- Give your advisees electronic access to general resources, commonly asked questions, etc., so that they can get information when you are not available. Some faculty advisors do this through web pages or blogs, others through Blackboard.
- Have open office hours, either in person or virtually, for your advisees a few times per semester.
- The advising relationship is based on mutual trust. Your interactions with your advisees are considered confidential.

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- Student records, including grades, attendance, academic progress, etc., are covered under FERPA regulations and you may not release this information to anyone, including the student's family members, without direct, written consent of the student.
  - Student health information, including mental health, is covered under HIPPA regulations and should not be disclosed to anyone.
  - You are also strongly advised not to send confidential information by email or by phone.

### **Case Study:**

#### Cassie the Curious

Cassandra Caldwell is a second-semester freshmen. She has just declared a major in Biology and wants to choose a second major. She has come to you for advice regarding whether or not your discipline would be a good choice.

What would you do when Cassie sits down in your office?

- Stage 1: Advising as Bookkeeping
  - Look at the requirements and 8 semester plan for the Biology major (found in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#) at or on-line at the Biology department's webpage )
  - Let Cassie know how well the Biology requirements fit with the requirements for a major in your field. Based on her record, consider whether or not she would reasonably be able to complete both majors in four years.
  - Consider prerequisites or other determinants for both Biology and your major. Does Cassie's record show that she will be able to complete these in a reasonable amount of time?
- Stage 2: Advising as Counseling
  - Ask Cassie questions.
    - Why did you choose a major in Biology?



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- What drew you to consider [your major]?
  - What kind of career path or paths are you considering?
  - What do you think are your greatest strengths as a student?
  - What do you think are your biggest challenges as a student?
  - Listen to Cassie's answers.
  - How well do her strengths and weaknesses fit with your major and her intended career path?
  - What information does she need in order to fully understand the career she is considering? Has she visited Career Services?
  - Are there other options for either careers or majors that she may not have considered yet?
  - Are there steps she can take to begin addressing her challenges?
  - Stage 3: Advising as Teaching
    - Look at the order in which Cassie is intending to take her classes. Talk to her about all of her classes, even those not related to her major(s).
    - Ask Cassie to compare and contrast how different disciplinary areas think or process information (in other words, not the content or the teaching). Include both science and your major.
    - Have Cassie work through a learning styles inventory (or two) to find out more about her own learning processes.
    - Have Cassie relate each of her classes, no matter how disparate, to your major and let her see the connections.
    - Work with Cassie to create a plan for her to master a set of transferable skills needed in her intended career field. These plans can include curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities.

*What notation would you put in Cassie's record after the appointment?*

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## ISSUE ALERT

- The Issue Alert System is designed to assist students who are experiencing academic and other difficulties during their time at WCU by providing University employees with a convenient means to make referrals to the students' assigned advisors and mentors.
  - Any time faculty and staff are concerned about a student, whether the student is a beginning freshmen or a last semester senior, they are encouraged to make a referral. By seeking to address the students' needs as they arise or become noticed, appropriate interventions can help to empower students to make choices that have a positive impact on their academic success.
  - Alerts may be submitted by following this [link](#).
- In many cases of student distress, faculty and staff can provide adequate help through empathic listening, facilitating open discussion of problems, instilling hope, conveying acceptance, giving reassurance and offering basic advice. If you have a student who you believe to be in distress, you might consider referring them to professional help. You will find more information at this [link](#).
- If you have a student who you believe is endangering themselves or others, you should get help immediately. Call the University Police at 828-227-8911. Let Them Know:
  - You are calling to report an emergency at Western Carolina University
  - The address
  - The injury or situation
  - The telephone number you are calling from
  - Your name and follow-up phone number
  - Upon completion of report, be sure to follow-up with your supervisor and the Office of Student Affairs at 828.227.7234, in accordance with university protocols.



## CHAPTER 2

# FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

This section covers the policies, procedures, programs, and best practices most commonly associated with first-year students. It's focus is on first year student success.





## FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

- Policies
  - Credits, Grades, and Quality Points
  - Academic Progress Reporting
  - Academic Standing
  - Grade Replacement/ Course Repeats
  - Withdrawal Policies
- Case Studies

Coming to college is often a big adjustment. Academically, students face raised expectations and increasing responsibility. Developmentally, traditional-aged students are entering into a new phase of late adolescence. Traditional students are often also moving away from home from the first time. Non-traditional students are likely to be apprehensive about coming back to college after being away. All of this can result in significant challenges for success in the first year even beyond the classroom.

WCU recognizes that the first year is a particularly formative one and, accordingly, devotes considerable resources to ensuring student success in the first year. In addition to the academic support units such as the Writing and Learning Commons and the Mathematics Tutoring Center, the university also has an Office of First Year Experiences ([FYE](#)), designed to coordinate curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities for first year students, including ASP (Academic Success Program), Learning Communities, transition courses, (such as USI 130 and LEAD courses) and First Year Seminars.

Advising first year students, then, often focuses on these three areas: understanding the pathway to obtaining the degree, transitioning successfully to college life, and knowing what support is available to them for achieving the first two goals.

In order to effectively advise first year students, faculty and staff must keep in mind University policies that bear a direct impact on students and may affect a student's timely path to graduation.

# POLICIES

## Credits, Grades, and Quality Points

- The basic unit of credit is the semester hour. A semester hour represents one lecture recitation hour or a minimum of one, two, or three laboratory hours a week for a semester. In experiential courses, a minimum of three hours is required per hour of credit.
- Course Load for Undergraduates. The minimum full-time course load during a fall or spring semester is twelve hours. A normal load is sixteen hours; however, a student may take up to eighteen hours. Any schedule that exceeds eighteen hours constitutes an overload and must be approved by the student's advisor and the appropriate administrators as indicated on the request and approval form. Twelve hours is the maximum that may be earned in experiential courses during a semester. Course load regulations for the mini or summer session are published on the Registrar's website at [www.wcu.edu/registrar](http://www.wcu.edu/registrar).
- Classification - Regular degree-seeking undergraduates are classified based upon cumulative hours earned:

Freshman 0-29 Hours	Junior 60-89 Hours
Sophomore 30-59 Hours	Senior 90 or more Hours

- Grading - The grades of A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D- and F indicate gradations in quality from Excellent to Failure. Please note that a C- grade is less than satisfactory and may not meet particular program and/or course requirements.
- Composition-Condition Marks. A student whose written work in any course fails to meet acceptable standards will be assigned a composition-condition (CC) mark by the instructor on the final grade report. All undergraduates who receive two CC grades prior to the semester in which they complete 110 hours at Western Carolina University are required to pass English 300 or English 401 before they will be eligible for graduation. This course must be taken within two semesters of receiving the second CC and must be passed with a grade of C (2.0) or better.

- The grading scale is as follows:

GRADE	INTERPRETATION	QUALITY POINTS	GRADE	INTERPRETATION	QUALITY POINTS
A+	Excellent	4.0	I	Incomplete	-
A	Excellent	4.0	IP	In Progress	-
A-		3.67	S	Satisfactory	-
B+		3.33	U	Unsatisfactory	-
B	Good	3.0	W	Withdrawal	-
B-		2.67	AU	Audit	-
C+		2.33	NC	No Credit	-
C	Satisfactory	2.0			
C-		1.67			
D+		1.33			
D	Poor	1.0			
D-		0.67			
F	Failure	0			

- To calculate a student's GPA:
  - Make a list similar to the worksheet below. List classes, the grade received, and the number of hours credit for each class. Refer to the Quality Point System table to obtain the points for each grade. Multiply the points by the hours of credit.

COURSE	GRADE	POINTS	X	HOURS	=	
ENGL 101	B+	3.33		3		9.99
PSY 150	C	2.0		3		6.0
HIST 141	D+	1.33		3		3.99
LEAD 142	A-	3.67		2		7.34
FYS 190	B-	2.67		3		7.41
		<b>TOTAL HOURS</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>TOTAL QUALITY POINTS</b>	<b>34.73</b>

- Divide the total points by the total hours to arrive at your GPA.
  - Example: 34.73 divided by 14 = 2.48.

### • Academic Progress Reporting

- Faculty are requested to submit 5th week progress reports for 100 and 200 level courses for all students and are encouraged to report progress in upper division courses as appropriate. Academic progress reports offer students important feedback on how they are doing early enough in the semester to take actions to improve their standing. Additionally, progress reports at the 8th and 11th week are requested for certain student populations; student athletes, students in the Academic Success Program (ASP), and students enrolled under the conditions of a **Learning Contract**.



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## • Learning Contract Program

- First semester freshmen and new transfers who earn a cumulative GPA within the range of 1.0 to 1.999 at the end of their first semester may return to the University for their second semester only if they choose to participate in the Learning Contract program.
- Learning Contract Program. First semester freshmen and new transfers will be placed on academic probation if their GPA falls within the range of 1.0 to 1.999 at the end of their first semester. Students placed on academic probation with a cumulative GPA in this range at the end of their first semester must participate in the Learning Contract program during their second semester. Students who do not choose this option are not eligible to continue enrollment in the University for one term. If readmitted after a lapse in enrollment, students are reminded that they will return to WCU under the general guidelines for academic probation.
- The Learning Contract Program specifies that these students work closely with an academic advisor. The student and advisor will discuss academic performance issues, set realistic goals, and make the necessary plans to reach those goals. Students will be linked with the campus resources that can help them succeed. Follow-up contacts will occur throughout the semester.

## • Academic Standing Policy

*Effective Fall 2014*

*See UNC Policy Manual, Section II: Student Success Policies*

Student Academic Standing is defined as either: Good Standing, Academic Probation, Academic Suspension, or Academic Dismissal. Academic Standing considers both qualitative (GPA) and quantitative (percent completion) measures.

### Good Academic Standing and Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

All students are expected to earn and maintain a grade-point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 each semester and to successfully complete (earn) at least 67% of their attempted hours. Successful completion of a course means that a student must have credit pending (i.e. incomplete) or must earn credit for the course with a grade other than F, U, NC or W.

Students in Good Standing will receive a notification if their semester completion rate falls below 67%.

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## • Grade Replacement Policy

*Effective Fall 2014*

*See UNC Policy Manual, Section II, D. Course Repeats, and Section II, F. Grade Exclusion or Grade Replacement*

Students may repeat a maximum of 16 credit hours. When a student repeats a course, only the most recent grade will be used in calculation of the student's grade point average and counted in the hours toward graduation. However, all grades shall remain on the student's transcript.

Exceptions:

1. The First Year Seminar may not be repeated.
2. Courses available for re-enrollment for additional credit are not counted as repeats unless the student declares a repeat or exceeds the number of times for which credit can be earned in the course.
3. Some academic programs may have policies that further regulate the number of repeats. Students should check with their advisor about additional regulations.

The 16 credit hour limit of the repeat/grade replacement policy may be appealed by the student in writing to the student's advisor, department head or program director, and Dean.

Note:

- All course repeats, except courses available for re-enrollment for additional credit, require a permit for enrollment.
  - *If a faculty advisor approves the repeat permit, he/she can call or email the department head to have the permit entered in Banner so the student can enroll. DO NOT SEND STUDENTS TO THE ONE STOP FOR REPEAT PERMITS. ONE STOP PERSONNEL DO NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO GRANT REPEAT PERMITS.*
- All repeats, except for re-enrollment for additional credit courses, result in a mandatory grade replacement. *(Regardless of the grade earned, the grade earned in the last course taken will replace the grade of the previous course.)*

Note: Pursuant to actions of the North Carolina General Assembly and policy adopted by the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, a fifty percent tuition surcharge applies to students who take more than 140 semester hours and more than eight regular semesters (i.e., fall and spring) to complete a baccalaureate degree. The semester hours used to calculate the total of 140 hours include repeated, failed, and transferred credit courses.

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## • Withdrawal Policies

*Effective Fall 2014*

*See UNC Policy Manual, Section II, C. Course Withdrawal*

### Course Withdrawals

After consultation with their academic advisor and the instructor of the course, a student may withdraw from any course prior to the expiration of one-half of the term and receive a W. Students are not permitted to withdraw from courses after one half the expiration of the term. A completed withdrawal form must be presented to the One Stop Student Service Center prior to the withdrawal deadline for posting. Course withdrawals do not count toward the twelve hours required for full-time enrollment and no refund is given.

**Students may withdraw from a maximum of 16 hours of courses during their career at Western Carolina University.** Any withdrawal beyond the limit will result in a Withdrew-Failing (WF) which will affect the semester and cumulative GPA as if it were an F.

Example: Student has previously withdrawn from five 3-hour courses for a total of fifteen hours. The student may not withdraw from another 3-hour course as this would exceed the limit. The student would, however, be able to withdraw from another 1-hour course.

### University Withdrawals

During the fall and spring semesters, a student may withdraw from the University through the last withdrawal date, as indicated by the registrar's office. During summer sessions, a University withdrawal occurs only if the student withdraws from all summer sessions. University withdrawals will affect satisfactory academic progress and course completion rates but will not count towards the student's 16-hour course withdrawal limit.

The University withdrawal process is initiated in the Advising Center, located in 214 Killian Annex. In the event of a University withdrawal, the student will receive a grade of "W" ("Withdrawn") for all courses in which the student was enrolled. The "Fees, Expenses and Financial Aid" section of this catalog provides information regarding the effects of University withdrawal upon tuition and fee payments and financial aid.

A student may not use this policy for courses in which penalty grades were assigned as a result of academic misconduct. In all cases, the withdrawal date is noted on the student's permanent record.

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### After the Withdrawal Deadline

There are three exceptions to the University withdrawal policy that will allow a student to withdraw from all courses. The exceptions are **medical withdrawals, withdrawals for deployment or other military contingency, and withdrawals for extenuating circumstances.**

### Withdrawal for Medical Reasons:

A designated physician or her or his designee at Western Carolina University Student Health Services reviews all medical withdrawals and evaluates the medical documentation. Medical withdrawals are of two types:

Regular medical withdrawal (withdrawal for current semester):

- Requires medical documentation from a private physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or therapist. If the student has not been seen at Western Carolina University Student Health Services or Western Carolina University Counseling and Psychological Services, appropriate medical records from an outside provider are required.
- Requires documentation from outside providers to a designated Western Carolina University physician or counselor. Documentation may be by mail, by fax, or hand-delivered, but it must be in writing. This documentation must specifically recommend withdrawal and must give a specific date of withdrawal.
- Will not be granted if any final examinations for the current semester have been taken.

Retroactive medical withdrawal (withdrawal for a previous semester):

- Requires medical documentation from a private physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or therapist, or a Western Carolina University Student Health Services or Western Carolina University Counseling and Psychological Services physician, psychologist, or counselor who treated the student during the semester requested.
- Requires documentation from providers to the designated physician. Documentation may be by mail, by fax, or hand-delivered, but it must be in writing. This documentation must specifically recommend withdrawal and it must give a specific date.
- Students who attempt the final exam in a class will not be allowed to medically withdraw.
- Retroactive withdrawals must be completed by the end of the next regular semester (fall or spring).

Medical Withdrawal from One Course:

- A student may not typically withdraw from individual courses for medical reasons. This includes courses in which penalty grades were assigned as a result of academic misconduct. A request to withdraw from a course or to reduce your academic load is not a University medical withdrawal.



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- Students who wish to withdraw from fewer than all of their current classes for medical reasons may appeal to the dean of the division in which the course/s is/are being offered. In these cases, the student must provide documentation to the dean regarding the medical problem treated at Western Carolina University Student Health Services or Counseling and Psychological Services. If treatment has not occurred at the Western Carolina University Student Health Center, documentation from the outside provider will be required.

Western Carolina University is under no obligation to grant a medical withdrawal if final examinations have been taken. Such situations must be handled as grade replacements.

A notation of “W” is entered on the permanent record of the student for all withdrawals from the University for Medical Reasons and will affect the student’s course completion rate. However, a medical withdrawal will not affect a student’s sixteen-hour limit for withdrawals.

#### Withdrawal for Deployment or Other Military Contingency:

When a student is called to active military service during an academic term, he or she may choose one of the following two options:

- The student may request retroactive withdrawal to the beginning of the semester, with a full refund of tuition and fees.
- If at least 75 percent of the term has been completed, the student may request that the faculty member assign a grade for the course based on the work completed. The final decision about grading is left to the faculty member.

If the faculty member assigns a grade of “I,” the student must complete course requirements within one semester or make alternative arrangements with the faculty member (see “Incomplete Policy”).

If a student decides to enlist in the military, he/she will be subject to the regular withdrawal process.

#### Withdrawals from the University for Extenuating Circumstances:

Students can petition the Office of the Provost to withdraw from the University for extenuating circumstances. Extenuating circumstances may include: death or serious illness within the immediate family, major life event in the family (e.g. loss of home, incarceration), financial hardship, pregnancy, and others as deemed appropriate by a member of the Office

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of the Provost. Withdrawal for extenuating circumstances will affect satisfactory academic progress and course completion rates but will not count towards the student's 16-hour withdrawal limit.

## CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 1: Faltering Freddie

Freddie Fernandez has finished his freshmen year with mixed results.

Fall		Spring	
• BIOL 151	C+	LAW 230	B
• ENGL 101	B-	MATH 101	W
• FYS 190	F	CHEM 110	F
• HIST 141	C	SOC 103	B-
• MATH 101	W	PSY 150	C
• Overall GPA: 2.1			

Freddie comes to you in May because he has not yet registered for classes for Fall.

He has declared your major, but really isn't sure if that's what he wants to do or not. What do you tell Freddie when he sits down in front of you

### Stage 1: Should Freddie consider retaking a course for a higher grade?

- Freddie can't retake USI 190. Freshmen seminar courses are non-repeatable. He will simply need to take another class to compensate for the hours.
- Freddie should choose which class to retake carefully. Students at WCU are only eligible to repeat 16 credits, so they should do so only in those courses that will have maximum impact on their GPA. The most likely candidate in this case is the CHEM 110 course.
- Freddie should only choose to retake a class if he is certain that he will be successful the second time. When a student repeats a course, only the most recent grade is used in calculation of the student's grade point average, even if the most recent grade is lower. Ask Freddie why he wasn't successful in his Chemistry course and see if you can ascertain whether or not those circumstances would be different if he took the course again.

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## Stage 2: Why is Freddie faltering?

- Freddie seems to be struggling with Math and Science courses. Talk to him about why he finds these to be especially challenging. See if he is aware of the resources at the Math Tutoring Center or for science tutoring at the WaLC.
- Freddie is carrying a relatively light load, especially considering his two withdraws. Ask him about the challenges he is facing in addition to his courses. Does Freddie have a job? What are his living arrangements? What extracurricular activities is he involved in?
- Freddie seems to be relatively uninspired. Talk to him about where he might see himself in five years. Have him visit the Career Center for career counseling.
- Talk to Freddie about his options for the summer and how they might influence his choices for the Fall. Should he take summer school classes? Could he (should he?) participate in study abroad, service learning, or other related activities?

## Stage 3: What is Freddie ready for?

- Ask Freddie to talk about the biggest differences between high school and college. In particular, ask him to compare how and what he learned in, say, history at each level.
- Ask Freddie to consider about why he withdrew from his Math class, but stuck with his science classes despite struggling with the material in both.
- Have Freddie connect what he has learned in each of his classes to your major. Do the connections make sense?
- Is there an independent project Freddie could pursue over the summer that might help him to meet his challenges or find an inspired direction? For example, could he interview or shadow someone in the field he is considering? Could he conduct independent research on a topic of special interest? Could he reach out to others, perhaps through social media, who share his interests and passions?

*What notation would you put in Freddie's record after the appointment?*

## Case Study: Pining Penny

In December, you take a look at your advisee list to see how each of your advisees fared that semester. Most of them seem to have made it through okay, but Penelope (Penny) Perkins finished her first semester as a freshmen with the following record:



- ENG 101            F
- FYS 190            D
- PSY 150            C
- MATH 101          C-
- BIOL 140           D
- Overall GPA: 1.8

This comes as a bit of a surprise because at 5 weeks, Penny seemed to be doing okay with satisfactory marks in all of her courses. You call Penny into your office. Before you even get a chance to talk to her, she bursts out in tears and says that she had roommate troubles in the dorm, she lost her grandmother around Thanksgiving, and is generally very homesick. What are you going to talk to her about?

### **Stage 1: Penny on Probation**

- Penny will be placed on academic probation, which occurs anytime a student has a GPA that falls below 2.0. If her GPA had fallen below 1.0, Penny would be suspended for one semester.
- Because she is a first semester freshmen, she will also have to be placed on a Learning Contract for the Spring semester. This means she will enroll in the Learning Contract course, LC 101. You will need to work closely with her to ensure that she meets the requirements specified in the contract.
- She will also need to make at least a 2.30 GPA in the spring semester in order to be able to continue.
- Penny will need to retake ENG 101. It is a required class and the grade replacement will likely help improve her GPA.

### **Stage 2: Penny's Problems**

- Talk to Penny about getting involved in campus organizations and other extracurricular activities. Getting engaged with the campus has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to combat homesickness.
- Consider referring to Penny to the campus Counseling Center to deal with her grief.
- The Division of Student Affairs works with students going through major life crises, such as the death of a family member. While it may be too late for this semester, Penny should know that she can go to that office (located ) and

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that they will send information to her advisor, professors, residential assistant, etc. to let them know what's going on in the event that she has to be absent from campus.

- Residential Living has options for students struggling with roommates or other dorm-related stressors. Penny can contact her Residential Director for help and advice. If she is not sure who her RD is, she can contact the main office for Residential Living at .

### **Stage 3: Penny Saved is a Penny Earned**

- This may be an opportunity for Penny to learn something about adult life. You may be able to help her work through some of those lessons and see what her experiences have taught her.
- Work with Penny to connect her experiences, even the negative or stressful ones, to progress in her major and/or chosen career field.

*What notation would you put in Penny's record about your visit?*

### **Case Study: Wavering Will**

Will Williams is a second semester freshmen who has come to you to schedule his courses for next fall. He also asks you if he can withdraw from BIO 150 this semester. He says that he's really struggling with it and does not believe that he can successfully complete the course.

At five weeks, he did receive a report of satisfactory progress in the course (and all of his others).

Fall	Spring
• ENGL 101 B	HIST 231
• FYS 190 B+	BIOL 140
• CHEM 132 W	COMM 201
• MATH 101 C+	SOC 103
• BUS 133 B	

What do you say to Will?

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## Stage 1:

- If Will wants to withdraw from the course, he has to complete a course withdrawal form (usually available in your department office. If not, the forms are available at the Advising Center).
- Will will need to withdraw from the course prior to the withdrawal deadlines, usually the 13<sup>th</sup> week of the semester. You can check the academic calendar for specific dates.
- If Will does decide to withdraw from the class during the first half of the semester, a W will appear on his transcript. The W does not count towards his GPA. Will should know, though, that some graduate programs recalculate GPAs to include Ws.
- If Will is, in fact, failing the course, the instructor may choose to enter a grade of WF (withdraw failing) or to otherwise not support the withdrawal.
- Students must have 12 credit hours to remain a full-time student. If Will withdraws from this course, he will no longer be considered a full-time student, which could have significant repercussions.
- One potential repercussion is financial aid. Students receiving financial aid are expected to make satisfactory academic progress (SAP) towards earning a degree, including a certain number of credit hours. Students should check the Financial Aid Office website for more information about SAP.

## Stage 2:

- Will is clearly not thriving in his science classes. You can talk to him about working with tutors at the WaLC to help him better grasp the material in his Biology class.
- Ask Will about his course load overall. His grades first semester were okay, but only with a pretty light load. You could consider referring him to the WaLC for additional practice in study skills, time management, or other related skills.

## Stage 3:

- Evaluate Will's 8 semester plan and show him the long-term repercussions if he completes only 21 hours his first year.

- Ask Will how he sees the relationship between Science and Math. Will's mathematical skills do not appear to be strong, which could also influence his success in science classes. Depending on his major, Will may want to enroll in additional Math courses or to take other steps to strengthen his skills in this area.
- Talk to Will about why he is required to take science classes and how those classes might contribute to his future career goals.

*What notation would you put in Will's record after the appointment?*

### **Case Study: Shy Violet**

You meet with Violet Vanderbilt for the first time after the end of her first semester at WCU. Before the meeting, you review her record briefly. Her high school grades were good (mostly Bs), perhaps just shy of great. She completed three early college courses at the local community college, earning 2 As and a B.

In person, she comes across as very shy and lacking confidence. She apologizes constantly and seems to be very worried or nervous (hand wringing, darting eyes, etc.).

Her first semester grades show the following:

- ENGL 101           A
- HIST 141           A-
- MATH 101           B+
- FYS 190            A
- PSY 150            A-
- GPA: 3.734

What do you talk to Violet about?

#### **Stage 1:**

- You should congratulate her—Violet made the Dean's list (3.5 GPA or higher with 12 credits or more, no Ds, Fs, or Is).
- Let her know that if she keeps it up, she may be eligible for honors at graduation. Her current grades would earn her *magna cum laude*.



- [To graduate *summa cum laude*, a student must have earned a minimum GPA of 3.90 on quality hours attempted at Western Carolina University for the degree; to graduate *magna cum laude*, a GPA of 3.70; and to graduate *cum laude*, a GPA of 3.50]
- Violet should consider joining the Honor's College. While she didn't qualify before this semester, her current record meets the requirements and she should receive a formal invitation in the spring semester. Honor's students receive priority registration, special advising, enhanced library privileges, access to living and meeting spaces, and the potential to graduate with honors.

### Stage 2:

- Academically, Violet is thriving, so talk to her about why she seems nervous. It could be something simple or unrelated. For example, first generation students are often simply nervous talking to a professor.
- Talk to Violet about getting involved in activities that may help boost her self-confidence. The Honors College and Student Government Association offer leadership opportunities. In addition, there are academic organizations and activities, such as Model United Nations or the Debate Team, which might be beneficial to her.
- It is possible Violet's behavior represents a deeper psychological issue, such as an anxiety disorder. You can talk to, or have Violet talk to, Counseling Services to see if such a condition exists and to look at treatment options.

### Stage 3:

- Ask Violet how she thinks her demeanor might affect her success. For example, many employers emphasize the need for knowledge workers to have collaborative skills. How can she cope with/reconcile/strategize the need for those skills?
- Recent research suggests that shy people may make better leaders than extroverts. Give Violet a copy of an article that talks about such issues and get her perspective on the matter.
- Make her an anthropologist. Have Violet tape herself doing an ordinary activity or activities, then watch the videotape as if she were an anthropologist observing from outside. How would she evaluate her behaviors and actions?
- Start to talk to Violet about graduate school options and what opportunities there may be for people with advanced degrees in the field.

*What notation would you put in Violet's record after the appointment?*