

**New Advisors Working with  
New Students at  
New College**

**A Guide to the First Semester**



**Office of the Provost  
Fall 2014**

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## **Introduction**

As faculty at New College, we are guided by the notion that “the best education demands a joint search for learning by exciting teachers and able students” and that “student progress should be based on demonstrated competence and real mastery, not merely the accumulation of credits and grades.” Such founding educational principles led to the establishment of the contract system. This system places importance on the relationship between advisor and advisee. Students make choices in dialogue with faculty mentors, who support students in their navigation of the New College experience.

The challenges of advising can be particularly daunting for new faculty. This guide attempts to provide support to those new to the process. Although each student may follow a different path to achieve his or her educational goals, every student new to New College moves through similar experiences with his or her advisor: preparing the contract each semester, renegotiating of the contract if necessary, and preparing for the ISP period in January. Transfer students not only face the challenges of adjusting to New College, but they must figure out how their previous college-level experiences fit with our system. This document will discuss issues relevant to all new students.

While this document might prove useful from time to time, it can only supplement working with colleagues who have experienced advising at New College first hand. Talk with Chairs and members of your discipline about approaches they take to guiding students. You will ultimately develop your own style.

In addition, please remember that no advisor has all the answers. Knowing when to refer a student to someone else is part of being a good advisor.

If you have feedback in regard to this guide and how it could be more useful, please contact Stephen Miles, Provost at 4200, [miles@ncf.edu](mailto:miles@ncf.edu)

## **I. How faculty members are assigned first year and transfer students.**

Each faculty member is assigned from one to eight new advisees, depending on his or her number of continuing advisees from the previous year.

The staff of the Provost's Office does its best to match advisors with appropriate advisees based on the student's admissions profile and his or her responses to questions on academic advising questionnaire. Some students may express interests that make them a clear match for a particular professor. Some provide very little information. Others are interested in fields where the faculty are already carrying large numbers of continuing students like psychology, political science and literature, and so are given an advisor outside of their area of interest. These information sheets are forwarded to the assigned advisors.

## **II. When the faculty member does not have all the answers**

Although the match may not be perfect, all faculty, regardless of discipline or areas of interest, can serve in an advisory role to new students. However, not all faculty members can answer all questions. In order to provide the best guidance for students, it may be necessary to refer them to other members of our campus community. In addition to colleagues in other fields who are just an email or phone call away faculty and students can turn to the following offices and individuals for resources:

### Student Affairs

Tracy Murry, Dean of Students 4250

### Registrar's Office

Marta Moreno, Registrar 4230

### Counseling and Wellness Center.

Anne Fisher, Director 4254

### Career Education & Off Campus Studies

(Search being conducted), Director 5002

### The Academic Division Chairs

Alberto Portugal, Humanities 4360

Paul Scudder, Natural Sciences 4370

David Harvey, Social Sciences 4380

### The Provost's Office

Stephen Miles, Provost 4200

Robert Zamsky, Dean of Studies 4225

Julie Morris, Assistant VP Academic Affairs 4527

### **III. The Structure of the Contract**

The contract contains four important fields of information that students and advisors should discuss: short and long-term goals, courses for academic credit, extracurricular activities, and certification criteria.

#### **Short- and long-term goals:**

Students are not evaluated on this portion of the contract, but the goals can serve as an important guide to conversation. For instance, if a student expresses a goal of studying political science with a focus on Latin America, she should probably study Spanish. If he or she wants to major in music, a course in music theory is likely needed. If the student wants to work with children, he might wish to volunteer with the Boys and Girls club. The stated goals can also serve as a record of the student's changing interests and increasing focus in his or her studies.

#### **Educational Activities Evaluated for Transcript Entry:**

Students should list the courses, tutorials, and other academic undertakings to be taken, totaling at least three units (a unit being equivalent to a full-semester course, a module-length courses being equal to one-half unit).

Although we do not have credit hours, we use established credit hour equivalencies when "translating" a New College transcript into a document that other institutions can understand for transfer credit or financial aid purposes. Federal rules require full-time students to enroll in a minimum of 12-credit hours (or equivalent) each semester and New College assigns each full-term course or tutorial 4 credit-hours' equivalence.

Expectations may vary by division and by faculty member as to how many courses a first year student should take. Students focusing in Natural Science disciplines are encouraged to take four or five classes, but are usually required to finish three classes successfully. In other words, if a student enrolls in four classes, the certification criteria are often "three out of four," meaning that the student "unsat" one full-term academic activity and still receive a "sat" for the contract. In the Divisions of Humanities and Social Science, most faculty encourage students to begin with four courses, and most will allow for certification renegotiation from "four out of four" to "three out of four."

If a student has arranged to take a tutorial or independent reading project (IRP), that activity should be initialed on the contract form by the faculty member sponsoring the tutorial or IRP (not the sponsor of the contract), and begin with "T" or "IRP," i.e. "T: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Counterpoint." Not every topic is appropriate for a tutorial. Activities such as "Car Repair" or "Sailing," should be listed as "other activities" rather than as something to be evaluated for transcript entry. Other tutorial ideas may be too demanding. A student may think that a queer theory tutorial will be light work, and then find out that there is a whole world of criticism to read and a whole new vocabulary to understand.

**Description and Other Activities:**

It is important to emphasize to students that they are not evaluated on this portion of the contract; however the section can serve several useful functions. Initially, this space was provided so that students could provide more detailed description of tutorials; however, it now a space to describe activities that are not on the contract for academic credit. The information can help the advisor understand what types of pressures the advisee might experience, or what outside interests students may have. For instance, students may record how many hours a week they are working, any co-curricular activities, and active roles in organizations. If a student proposes an activity that the advisor does not want to consider for academic credit, it can be listed as an “other activity.”

Activities recorded in this part of the contract can be acknowledged in the contract certification, and, much like the goals section, can serve as a record of the student’s campus and community involvement, work off campus, and progress in achieving goals. It is appropriate for a contract sponsor to discuss the importance of balance between academic work and other activities in a college student’s life. This part of the contract can initiate this important conversation about balance.

**Certification Criteria:**

In this portion of the contract the sponsor states the number of educational activities (courses and tutorials) that the student must satisfactorily complete in order to satisfy the contract. Many faculty sponsors begin with the expectation that all classes should be completed successfully, and expect the student to return to renegotiate if she or he encounters problems.

In some cases faculty use the phrase “mutual satisfaction” as a certification criterion. Usually, “mutual satisfaction” is agreed upon as the contract certification criteria only late in a student’s academic career, after student and sponsor have established a good working relationship, and when flexibility in the number of courses or academic endeavors completed is an acceptable option. Such a certification criterion may be useful when a student wants to take adventurous or challenging classes in his or her final semester, but who needs only finish the thesis to graduate. The terms of the mutual agreement should be clear to each of the parties to avoid later problems.

**IV. Preparing the Contract**

Advisors have two formal encounters with their advisees during orientation week: the group meeting with first-year advisees on Wednesday, and the individual meetings on Friday.

**First meeting (group):**

Begin by introducing yourself, and then ask students to introduce themselves to you and the group. After introductions, you may wish to move to questions from the students. Such an opening may lead them to talk among themselves as much as with you, a positive outcome. By the end of the meeting make sure that they know when their appointment with you is scheduled for Friday afternoon, how to reach you and where to

find your office. You may wish to distribute a handout with contact information, including email, phone, office location, and office hours.

It might also be helpful to have the following resources in hand:

- A map of campus
- A class schedule

You may also wish to distribute the syllabi for courses you are teaching that are open to first-year students. It is not required that an advisee take a class from his or her advisor, but many students find it useful since they get to know their advisor better when they also take a class with her or him.

During this first meeting you should explain the structure and purpose of mini-classes, and what students learn from attending them. Emphasize that all mini-classes are open to all students, and that they will get the most useful information if they ask questions.

Good questions for students to ask teachers during mini-classes:

- Are there any prerequisites or required courses that introduce basic skills necessary or more advanced work?
- Will the class size be limited?
- How will you determine which students can enroll?
- Is this a good class for a first-year student?
- How many papers or exams do you require, and when will they be due or take place?

Some other helpful advice to provide students at this time:

- Explain that tutorials are rarely offered for first-year students. Stress the importance of building relationships with faculty in order to work with them *in the future* as contract and ISP advisors, and tutorial sponsors.
- Urge first year students to take at least one course, and possibly more, with tenure-track faculty each semester—avoid completing too many courses with adjuncts and visiting professors. Adjuncts cannot offer tutorials or sponsor theses, and can only to serve on baccalaureate committees as fourth readers.
- Tell students to be aware of the schedules for exams and due dates for papers in order to create a realistic schedule. It is difficult to manage more than one class with a twenty-page paper, or to complete four classes that have midterms the same day.

### **Second meeting (individual)**

By the Friday of orientation week students should have attended mini-classes and will have some idea of what they wish to take. They are also likely to have numerous questions. This is the time when you can begin using the contract as a template for conversation. Start by asking about goals, classes, and other activities, especially if a student is reticent.

Other issues:

- Talk about the fact that students may not get into every class they wish to take. They need to think broadly about what interests them, and have a back-up plan if their first choices are unavailable.
- Work through the LAC worksheet with the student and make sure he or she understands how the Liberal Arts Curriculum works.
- Encourage students to begin thinking about the ISP and which faculty they might wish to work with for that project.
- Recognize that students may need to talk about homesickness, roommate problems, and other issues outside of a faculty member's expertise. If you feel uncomfortable, remember that a number of professional staff on campus can also support students with problems (See page 1-2 for a list of resources).

### **Contract negotiation and signing:**

It is useful to schedule one meeting during the first week of classes after students have had a chance to attend classes, to finalize the details of the contract. During this meeting when you sign the contract, allow the student an opportunity to articulate his or her goals. Make sure that the criteria for satisfying the contract have been established.

Encourage students to stay in touch through email and visits during office hours. Specifically ask the student to meet with you during the first week following fall break. Emphasize the following deadlines for Fall semester.

Fall Classes Begin Monday, August 25

**Contract Submission Deadline Wednesday, September 3**

Fall Break October 11-17

**Contract Renegotiation Deadline Friday, November 14**

**January ISP Description Forms Due Monday, December 1**

Fall Classes End Wednesday, December 3

Reading/Hurricane Make-Up Days Thurs-Fri, December 4-5

Week of Exams/Advising/Evaluation Mon-Fri, December 8-12

### **V. Renegotiating the Contract**

Faculty usually encourage students to begin the semester with a certification criteria that requires that all be classes satisfactorily completed (i.e., three out of three, four out of four, or five out of five). Some students, first-year students in particular, feel the stress of this arrangement early in the semester, and will return to his or her advisor to renegotiate the contract. In most cases, these students wish to change the criteria from "four-out-of-four" to "three out of four" in order to give them some room for error. However, if they are already taking three classes, there is little room for renegotiation. Students who want to renegotiate may do so because they have little understanding of how they are doing in their classes, since they are not accustomed to the types of feedback they are receiving. They may feel that a "three out of four" arrangement provides them a safety net. You can

expect that the student will work to pass all four courses regardless of the certification criteria. Such a renegotiation can be helpful to the student and to you as an advisor. The student touched base with you, and will probably satisfactorily complete all four classes even though he or she needs only three satisfactory evaluations to complete the contract.

The student's contract is in more jeopardy if he or she chooses to drop one of the initial courses from four classes to three. When a student contacts you about renegotiating and wants to drop a class, caution her that the satisfactory completion of three full-term academic activities is necessary to maintain status as a full-time student. Dropping the wrong class, one in which the student can succeed but does not wish to continue, might lead to an unsatisfactory contact if work in another class falters. For instance, a student who finds that she dislikes art history but is doing fine in the class may find that her weak math skills will not allow her successful completion of her calculus class. She drops art history, thus dropping to a "three out of three" contract, but then "unsats" calculus, and consequently "unsats" her first contract. Such scenarios can occur with students at any level at New College, but are particularly common for first-year students, who may not yet understand the feedback they receive without letter grades. Sometimes students cannot be swayed from choosing a path, and they will unofficially drop a class and stop attending. There may be little an advisor can do to help a student in such circumstances.

#### **IV. Certification of the Contract**

One measure of a student's progress toward graduation is the number of satisfactorily completed contracts. A minimum of seven contracts are required for graduation from New College. In order to document the status of each individual contract, the academic sponsor (or advisor—the terms are interchangeable) will read the evaluations their advisee receives for each academic activity, and complete the online contract certification.

Contracts are certified by sponsors at the end of the semester, after all narrative evaluations for academic activities (classes, tutorials, IRP's) have been completed. Contract certifications are entered into the SES (Student Evaluation System), and are due ten days after the beginning of the following semester. For more information about contract certification, see 6.5.4 of the Faculty Handbook.

The on-line contract certification form includes a space for a short narrative that describes the student's work for that semester and suggests directions for improvement or future study, in addition to the designation of "Satisfactory," "Unsatisfactory," or "Incomplete," depending on whether or not the certification criteria have been met.

#### **VII. Preparing for the ISP Project**

In theory, the ISP is designed to provide students an opportunity to pursue independent research as preparation for work on the thesis. In reality, first-year students have little background to support such independent work, and need the support of faculty members to shape their ideas into successful projects. It is never too early in the semester for a

student to think about the ISP and to start discussing their ideas with faculty members, including his or her contract sponsor, for ISP projects.

There are additional sources of information about possibilities for the ISP

- The Provost's Office provides an ISP handbook, which is updated every year and distributed in late October/early November. This book lists faculty interests in ISPs, types of ISPs that faculty will sponsor outside of their specific disciplines, and also contains a section describing group ISPs designed by faculty with first-year students in mind.
- The Provost and the Dean of Students host an ISP workshop in early November at which students discuss successful ISPs, faculty talk about group ISPs they will offer, and faculty discuss the planning that contributes to a positive ISP experience.
- ISP is a good time for internships and study abroad.

*First-year students are required to spend their first ISP on campus unless they receive special permission from the Office of the Provost. In order to request permission, the student needs to submit a written proposal, and the advisor should provide a letter of support in advance of the December 1st deadline for submitting ISP forms to the Registrar's Office.*

### **Common First-year Problems that Affect Academic Performance**

The following list includes problems that a first-year student might encounter and communicate to an advisor. Suggested solutions are also included.

- Not knowing how to study: Note taking skills, study skills are weak, the student has never faced the challenges that New College presents. *An advisor may be able to address these problems, and suggest that the student ask the instructors in their other classes for tips on study skills.*
- Lack of preparation: poor writing skills, poor quantitative skills. *The student should visit the Writing Resource Center and/or the Quantitative Resource Center.*
- Not understanding feedback without grades, no sense of how well or poorly they are doing. *The contract sponsor can encourage the student to ask their instructors for, feedback especially if there are areas where their performance needs to improve.*
- Health crises. *Contact Counseling and Wellness Center and/or Dean of Students*
- No social network or, conversely, too much socializing. *Contact the Dean of Students who will discreetly use the Residential Advisors and to connect the student with a healthier social network.*
- Working at a job too many hours per week. *Contact the Dean of Students*
- Missing classes and deadlines, poor time management skills. *Contact the Dean of Students, Student Affairs staff, and the Writing Resource Center*
- Homesickness, family problems, lack of family support (financial, cultural). *Suggest that the student make an appointment at the Counseling and Wellness*

*Center, or contact the Dean of Students who will work with the Residential Advisor's to help.*

- *Dormitory life disrupts academic work. The student should contact the Associate Dean of Students. The College rule is: two on-campus complaints about loud music end the social event. The student, however, has to register a complaint. If the person is reluctant to call in a complaint for social reasons, s/he should make an appointment to meet the Associate Dean of Students and they will address the issue in residence halls.*

## **Frequently-Asked Questions**

### **How does a student obtain a new advisor?**

When a faculty member signs a contract, he or she becomes the advisor to the student. It is not possible for a student to change advisors during a term. He or she must wait until the next contract. There is no official form for advisor changes. The new contract, signed by a new advisor serves as official notification to the Registrar that the student has changed advisors.

### **Can a student change advisors between the fall semester and the January ISP period?**

No. The faculty contract sponsor during the semester must also sign the “academic sponsor” line of the ISP Description Form for the ISP period that follows the contract.

### **What if I am out of town near a deadline for students to turn in a form that needs my signature?**

In cases when the advisor is unavailable, the Division Chair of the contract sponsor may sign student forms.

### **Can a student complete more than the three required ISPs?**

If a student pays for a fourth ISP, he or she may register for it.

### **If a student “unsats” a contract, does he or she lose “credit” for the classes completed satisfactorily as well as the contract?**

No. All classes and academic activities that receive a satisfactory evaluation are recorded on the student's official New College of Florida transcript regardless of the success or failure of the contract.