

Guidance on the Content of Undergraduate Advising Notes at the University of Notre Dame

In building an integrated Electronic Student File (ESF) solution, the University recognizes the value of a common approach to creating and maintaining advising notes. Such a system provides a place to record, share and integrate the advice that various University advising offices provide to undergraduate students during their time at Notre Dame. In place of the separate notes that each office makes and keeps as it works with students, the ESF will provide a tool that facilitates the sharing of a student's advising history between advising offices working with that student. This tool is expected to help advisors better understand a student's history at Notre Dame and better integrate past advising or guidance into their own advice to the student. This routine sharing of advising information between offices should enhance a student's experience with his or her advisors.

The aim of recording advising notes in ESF is to create a record of a student's advising contacts—both the issues discussed and the advice provided. This “institutional memory” as created through the advisor notes section of the ESF will summarize the student's contact with advisors, and granting advisors access to that information is believed to improve advisor efficiency, increase the continuity and coherence of advisors' conversations with the student, and provide the student a more personal sense of contact, whether the student is seeing the same advisor again, or a new advisor. The record can also provide useful information to other school officials who have a legitimate educational interest in accessing such records.

Although advisors are generally prohibited from disclosing student records without a student's written consent, the University's FERPA Student Records Policy explains that certain University personnel acting with a legitimate educational interest are permitted to access educational records -- even without a student's consent -- as “school officials.” But a person must be a “school official” and have a “legitimate educational interest” before accessing such educational records. For additional information concerning the protections applied to student records, including when they may be used and disclosed without a student's written consent, please review the University's FERPA policy:

http://policy.nd.edu/policy_files/FERPA%20Policy%20-%20edits%20052014.pdf

Why Take Notes?

- Creates a record of student's advising contacts and advice provided; creates institutional memory.
- Increases advisor efficiency and effectiveness, especially when working with students that are pursuing second majors or minors in different Colleges.
- Refreshes advisor memory prior to return visits and helps when planning next steps.
- Communicates critical information to other University personnel.
- Personalizes the advising experience.

Best Practices of Note-Taking

- Assume that what you write may be viewed by students, their parents, or the general public.
- Ensure that the statements you make orally and in writing are factual and appropriate.
- The primary purpose in writing notes should be to convey to a reader the main substance of the consultation, the goals and outcomes of the meeting, and any agreed-upon follow-up activities.

- Students may disclose personal information of a sensitive or confidential nature. Use general or non-descript language—and your own good judgment—to describe such sensitive and confidential information.
- In many instances, it may not be appropriate to record in detail disclosures by students of sensitive or confidential information. Such information is typically disclosed to an advisor in confidence and could embarrass a student or upset his/her expectation of privacy if leaked to or inappropriately accessed by others. Accordingly, advisors should not record the following types of personal information in detail in the advisor notes section of the ESF: any explicit references to sexual assaults, crimes (whether perpetrator or victim), eating disorders, and medical or mental health issues or diagnoses.
- When a student discloses sensitive or confidential personal information that the advisor needs to remember, but which would be too sensitive to include in the advisor notes section of the ESF, the advisor must take notes on paper (and not in an electronic medium). Such handwritten notes should be kept in a secure location, and destroyed as soon as they are no longer needed by that advisor or upon the student's graduation, whichever is earlier. Note that all handwritten notes *could* be obtained and potentially made public in a lawsuit.
- In general, handwritten notes containing sensitive or confidential personal information should not be transferred in the scenario where a student transfers between Colleges. However, there may be some scenarios where this is justified- consulting with the Office of General Counsel is always appropriate.
- Always document your referral; this indicates you did something about the student's situation.

Medical Documentation

- Federal and state laws protect the confidentiality of medical records, and as a result, medical documentation should not be included in the ESF and, thus, in the student's academic record.
- To the extent the advisor is provided and asked to review medical documentation by a student, the advisor may not include that documentation in the ESF. However, the advisor may use general or non-descript language—and his or her own good judgment—to describe such sensitive and confidential information.
- In cases where it is necessary to retain such confidential information, paper copies of these materials should be kept in a secure location with any handwritten notes, and destroyed as soon as they're no longer needed by the advisor or upon the student's graduation, whichever is earlier.
- If a student's treatment records are disclosed for purposes other than treatment (e.g., if they are shared with an advisor), the treatment records will become "educational records" subject to FERPA.

Advising Notes in ESF: How Much Is Too Much?

Examples

Scenarios Requiring Non-descript or “Coded” Language:

As noted, advisors are required to use non-descript or coded language in their advising notes in the ESF when referring to sexual assaults, crimes, eating disorders, and medical or mental health issues or diagnoses.

Scenario 1: Student discloses sexual assault

Situation: A student discloses that s/he was the victim of a sexual assault

What is too much: Jane disclosed that she was raped at an off-campus party this weekend. I confirmed that the alleged perpetrator has been arrested and does not pose a continuing threat to Jane’s safety. We discussed the communication of excused absences to her professors for the duration of her hospitalization. To fulfill my Title IX reporting obligation, I contacted Bill Stackman in Student Affairs immediately after our advising meeting. I also set up a meeting for Jane with Erica Kelsey of the Care Team/Behavioral Concerns Team for ongoing support.

What is just right: After Jane disclosed a recent incident of a personal nature, I helped her obtain officially excused absences and spoke with Bill Stackman from Student Affairs. I also scheduled a meeting between Jane and Erica Kelsey from the Care Team for additional support.

Scenario 2: Student commits crime

Situation: Student discloses that s/he was arrested for public intoxication and missed a final exam.

What is too much: Jim disclosed that he had spent all night drinking at a bar in town and was arrested on his way home. As a result, he missed his final exam today in Intermediate Microeconomic Theory. I contacted Prof. Smith to determine whether a makeup might be appropriate/possible.

What is just right: Jim disclosed a personal incident that caused him to miss his final exam in Intermediate Microeconomic Theory. I contacted Prof. Smith to determine whether a makeup might be appropriate/possible.

Scenario 3: Eating Disorder

Situation: Student tells you that her/his schoolwork is suffering because s/he has an eating disorder.

What is too much: Sarah disclosed that she has an eating disorder which has begun to impact her academics. I asked if she would like me to arrange a meeting with a therapist or psychiatrist at the University Counseling Center. She agreed.

What is just right: Sarah came to discuss a personal issue that is impacting her academics. As a result of the conversation, I put her in contact with Erica Kelsey with the Care Team for additional support.

Scenario 4: Student discloses that they are suicidal

Situation: A student verbally says to you during an advising appointment, “I’m going to commit suicide before the semester is over.”

What is too much: Met with student to talk about next semester’s classes. Recommended he gets started on his foreign language requirements. At the end of our meeting, when I asked him how things are going, John said “I’m going to commit suicide before the semester is over”. I immediately walked John to the University Counseling Center (UCC).

What is just right: Met with student to talk about next semester’s classes. Recommended he get started on her foreign language requirements. At the end of our meeting, when I asked him how things are going, John disclosed a serious personal situation so I immediately walked John to the University Counseling Center (UCC).

Scenario 5: Advisor suspects depression

Situation: An advisor suspects a depressed student could be suicidal, but the student has not said anything.

What is too much: Reviewed remaining degree requirements and talked about Jane’s graduation plans. Jane does not seem excited about graduating and seems really depressed. I worry that she is considering suicide but has not said anything to make me think this. I am worried. I referred Jane to the UCC and also encouraged her to schedule the appointment in my office.

What is just right: Reviewed remaining degree requirements and talked about plans after graduation. Jane does not have job leads so I referred her to our Career Center. At the end of our meeting, I asked her how things are going. Based on our conversation I contacted a member of the Care Team.

Scenario 6: Illness (mental or physical) disclosed by student

Situation: A student disclosed an illness (mental or physical) that is affecting schoolwork

What is too much: Met with Joe to reduce his course load because he indicated that he is suffering from bi-polar disorder and cannot handle three courses this semester. Joe stated that he is working with a psychologist and is currently taking medication. Joe will consult with me for future term scheduling.

What is just right: Met with Joe to reduce his course load because he provided documentation of a medical situation. Joe will consult with me for future term scheduling.

Scenario 7: Student discloses learning disability

Situation: A student informs you that she is not doing well in course work despite the fact that she is using every tutoring/learning assistance resource available. After you learn that she is indeed trying and that she seems to lose concentration very quickly you decide to refer her to Disability Services.

What is too much: Jane came in to discuss her lack of success in her course work this term. After an extensive conversation of how she is approaching her schoolwork I decided to refer her to Disability Services for consultation because I really think she might have attention deficit disorder.

What is just right: Jane came in to discuss her lack of success in her course work this term. After an extensive conversation of how she is approaching her schoolwork I referred her to Disability Services.

Additional Recommended Coded Language Scenarios:

Scenario 8: Death in family / family emergency

Situation: A student discloses that her/his grandfather passed away and will require excused absences to attend the funeral.

What is too much: John's grandfather died this weekend after a long battle with Alzheimer's Disease. John will miss class this coming week to attend the funeral in California. I extended my condolences and contacted Bill Stackman so that Student Affairs might send out officially excused absences to his professors. I asked if he wanted me to refer him to the UCC for grief counseling after his return. He will let me know.

What is just right: John's grandfather passed away this weekend. John will miss class this coming week to attend the funeral in California. I contacted Bill Stackman so that Student Affairs might send out officially excused absences to his professors. I discussed support services should he wish to make use of them.

Scenario 9: Family situation

Situation: A student is requesting to drop a course after the drop deadline, and tells you via e-mail that her personal circumstances for the semester in question are related to having a protection order against her abusive father. Her mom then e-mailed you and told you more about the situation, which included the student filing a civil suit against him.

What is too much: Jane e-mailed me stating that her father hits her and is verbally abusive which is causing her to miss a lot of school. Her mother e-mailed me with more information and added that they are in the process of filing a civil suit against the father.

What is just right: Because of complications arising from a personal issue, Jane was provided an accommodation in the form of allowing her to withdraw from MATH10350 after the drop deadline.

Scenario 10: Challenging student

Situation: You met with a student related to a schedule adjustment. She was extremely rude and not flexible with scheduling. The scheduling process was very hard.

What is too much: Met with Jane related to her request to adjust her schedule. Jane demanded to have all of her courses after 12:30pm and would not take a math course despite our suggestions. Jane was extremely rude.

What is just right: Met with Jane related to her request to adjust her schedule. She resisted my suggestions. I explained the potential impacts of her preferences. We worked out her schedule after much deliberation. She elected not to take a math course against my guidance.

Scenario 11: Attendance issues

Situation: A student has missed their last 2 weeks of classes and discloses to you that they have a sleep disorder.

What is too much: Met with John related to class attendance. He has missed 2 weeks of classes and he told me it's because he has a sleep disorder. I suggested he talk to a counselor at UCC about his sleep issue, and recommended he communicate with his professors.

What is just right: Met with John related to class attendance. He has missed 2 weeks of classes. I suggested John contact UCC for assistance and recommended he communicate with his professors.

Scenario 12: Reported behavioral issues

Situation: A student has missed 2 weeks of classes and has been unresponsive to any e-mails from the professor and advisor. The advisor calls the rector to see if they can check on the student. The rector tells you that the student hasn't left her room in 2 weeks and isn't showering.

What is too much: Professor Jones reported to me that Sara has missed 2 weeks of classes and has not responded to emails. I called her rector. The rector told me that the student hasn't left her room in 2 weeks and isn't showering. I asked the rector to bring the student into my office or to the UCC for assistance.

What is just right: Professor Jones reported to me that Sara has missed 2 weeks of classes and has not responded to emails. I called her rector. Based on our conversation, I asked the rector to bring the student into my office or to the UCC for assistance.

Scenario 13: Witnessed behavioral issues

Situation: A student comes in to discuss academic difficulties and in the course of the conversation you notice erratic behavior and obvious signs of drug use.

What is too much: Met with Joe to discuss his academic difficulties. He failed to maintain eye contact and appeared to be high. After he left I called Erica Kelsey from the Care team. We agreed to schedule another meeting with the student where she would be present.

What is just right: Met with Joe to discuss his academic difficulties. Based on our meeting, after he left I called Erica Kelsey from the Care team. We agreed to schedule another meeting with the student where she would be present.