

Operation Manual for Academic Advisors

Office of Undergraduate Studies

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Academic Advising Resource Material

References

I. Definitions and Nature of Academic Advising

According to the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO, 1980), an advisor was defined as “a member of the college staff (usually a member of the instructional faculty) assigned to assist a student with academic planning” (p. 8). Similarly, the Noel-Levitz Participant Book/Resource Guide (Houland, Anderson, Noel-Levitz, McGuire, & Crockett, 1997) conceived academic advising as “a process of giving students guidance, support and encouragement” (p. 3) and it helps students “diminish the confusion that comes with a new environment, clarify their goals and get the most out of their education” (p. 3).

According to the Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) (2006), “Academic Advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and time frames” (Summary Section).

In the above definition, there are **three elements in academic advising**. The first element is **curriculum** (i.e., the “what” of student advising), which includes broad issues such as ideals of higher education (e.g., mission of university education, particularly with reference to PolyU) and narrow issues surrounding subject selection. The second element is **pedagogy** (i.e., the “how” of student advising), which includes preparation, implementation, documentation, evaluation and improvement of the advising process. The final element is **student learning outcomes** (i.e., the “results” of academic advising), which includes what students understand, choose, value and behave as a result of academic advising. Generally speaking, it is expected that effective academic advising leads to the following outcomes: a) development of an educational plan according to one’s abilities and interests; b) ability to use a wide range of information to set educational goals; c) take personal responsibility to meet the academic requirements; and d) appreciate options available in fulfilling higher education and the institutional mission.

Academic advising plays an important role in achieving the mission of higher education. In a broad sense, students learn to reflect their roles and responsibilities as citizens within the university community in reaching their academic goals. In a narrow sense, academic advising helps students fulfill the undergraduate study requirements leading to academic success (Ford, 2003).

II. Aims of Academic Advising

- 1.** Create a supportive and student-friendly atmosphere that fosters success in the study of students.
- 2.** Provide personal contact so that students can be connected to the institution.
- 3.** Encourage students to utilize support services in the University, such as the services provided by the Student Affairs Office (SAO) and Office of Undergraduate Studies (OUS).
- 4.** Help students understand their academic and personal goals.
- 5.** Guide students to develop realistic educational plan in fulfilling the graduation requirements and help them evaluate the attainment of the goals.
- 6.** Examine with students on Transfer of Study and Minor Study issues when need arises.
- 7.** Provide up-to-date information on the University's policies and procedures regarding the undergraduate study.
- 8.** Help students develop decision making skills and promote their sense of self-direction.

III. Policy on Academic Advising at PolyU

The background, aims and proposed structure of academic advising under the 4-year undergraduate degree structure at PolyU can be seen in the policy paper (LTC/42/A4) of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). For the most updated policy paper on the one-tier academic advising system, please refer to the website of OUS.

IV. Framework on Academic Advising at PolyU: Philosophy, Core Values, and Operation

- **Philosophy of Academic Advising**

According to Crookston (1994), there are two perspectives on academic advising. While the prescriptive approach focuses on the limitations of students and upholds the assumption that students are less proactive, the developmental perspective focuses on the potentials of students and believes that students are intrinsically striving and active.

At PolyU, a developmental approach of academic advising is adopted. Advising is considered as a developmental process through which students are assisted, guided, supported and empowered to identify their academic and personal goals, develop plans and strategies to achieve them, and evaluate the outcomes of their own planning. With the assistance of Academic Advisors, students are expected to take personal responsibility to think critically and reflectively to examine available opportunities and resources to determine their study plan. It is expected that academic advising promotes self-understanding which enables students to have an aspiration of academic success and to achieve their academic and personal goals.

PolyU is committed to pursue excellence in academic advising and to build supportive relationships with students which are instrumental to helping students achieve their academic goals. Specifically, PolyU strives to create a supportive and student-friendly atmosphere that fosters success in undergraduate study, encourages students to understand their academic and personal goals, and empowers students to attain their goals.

- **Core Values of Academic Advising (RESPECT)**

1. **Respect:** The views, decisions and diversity of the students are honoured in the process.
2. **Excellence in academic advising:** Provision of timely, proactive, accurate, coherent and professional advising with strong student engagement.
3. **Student orientation:** Focus on the paramount importance of care for the students, confidentiality and shared responsibility. Through academic advising, students are helped to take ownership of their education, including to understand one's own abilities and interests, develop personal and academic goals, formulate study plans, implement them and evaluate the strategies.
4. **Personal and social responsibility:** Independent thinking as well as personal and social responsibility of the students are emphasized so that students can make informed and responsible choices consistent with their own study and life goals.
5. **Emphasis on reflection:** Active promotion of self-reflection and personal inquiry in the advising process.
6. **Collaborative relationship:** The importance of mutual involvement and planning is emphasized.
7. **Timely advising:** Students are engaged as early as possible. Academic

Advisors will take proactive measures to assist students with greater academic needs.

- **Operation of Academic Advising at PolyU (One-Tier System)**

Since 2012/13, PolyU had operated a dual academic advising system. In a recent review suggested by the senior management, it was proposed to consolidate the academic advising system to a single one where Academic Advisors in the Schools or Departments will play a major role in academic advising according to the broad principles and guidelines stipulated in LTC/42/A4. There are several justifications for this change:

1. As the General University Requirements (GUR) curriculum at PolyU is not complex, there is no need for a separate academic advising system.
2. Having two tiers of academic advising systems may be confusing to teachers and students. In particular, Academic Advisors in the Schools or Departments should help students develop their study plans and academic aspirations where appropriate.
3. With a decade of consolidation, teachers and students should have a more solid understanding of the nature of GUR.
4. Sister institutions in Hong Kong generally adopt a single academic advising system.

V. The Academic Advising Process

1. **Dimensions of Academic Advising:** According to O'Banion (1994), there are four dimensions of academic advising. These include: a) exploration of life goals; b) exploration of career/educational goals; c) selection of programmes; and d) class scheduling. In particular, academic advising is not simply course selection. How students set their life, career and educational goals would be important consideration for selecting the programme and subject(s) that could facilitate their progress.
2. **Strategies of Academic Advising:** Several strategies are conducive to successful academic advising. These include: a) attempt to have good acquaintance with students; b) explore interests, motivation and academic and personal goals of students; c) have good knowledge about the policies, rules and procedures related to different academic programmes; d) evaluate student motivation; and e) engage students in the process and empower the students.
3. **Departmental Academic Advising plan:** Academic Advisors at the Schools/Departments should follow the departmental academic advising plan as far as possible, particularly with respect to the scope, frequency, confidentiality and documentation of academic advising.
4. **Relationship with the Departmental Undergraduate Secretary:** Academic Advisors at the Schools/Departments are expected to work closely with the School/Departmental Undergraduate Secretary. The School/Departmental Undergraduate Secretary should supply updated information on matters related to the undergraduate programmes and academic advising to Academic Advisors.

For non-academic issues or matters that require more in-depth follow up, Academic Advisors are advised to refer such cases to Counsellors of SAO for counselling with consent of the student. In case of doubt, Academic Advisors should consult the Programme Leader or Department Head as early as possible.

5. **Connection to other supporting services:** Academic Advisors should connect students to other support services across campus where appropriate, helping each student accomplish more as a student. A wide range of services are provided by SAO, including counselling service, sports development activities, career services, and student resources and support services. In case teachers and students need more information on GUR, they may contact OUS.
6. **Confidentiality:** The general principle is that the grades and other personally identifiable information of the student should normally not be provided to a third party without verbal consent and written permission of the student.
7. **Quality Assurance of Academic Advising:** Academic Advisors are expected to provide quality academic advising to students. They should meet the training requirements as stipulated in LTC 42/A4 and discuss special cases with Programme Leaders or Department Head as appropriate. OUS will support academic advising by providing training to Academic Advisors, giving information on GUR, providing consultation service for student advising, and supporting the quality assurance of academic advising service.

VI. Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors

The main responsibilities of the Academic Advisor include:

- a) building rapport with students;
- b) being accessible, available and responsive;
- c) helping students clarify their intellectual, professional and personal goals;
- d) helping students develop an appropriate study plan;
- e) alerting students to academic regulations and requirements, particularly those relating to their study (both Major and GUR)
- f) providing early identification of students with special learning needs or signs of learning problems and making necessary referrals;
- g) contacting with students regularly and have at least one face-to-face/online meeting (individually or in small groups) during the academic year. Students are expected to consult their advisors before subject registration.

Accordingly, Academic Advisor should:

1. have a clear understanding of:
 - i. study pathways;
 - ii. discipline-specific requirements;
 - iii. General University Requirements (GUR);
 - iv. University policies on undergraduate studies; and
 - v. opportunities and resources within the University.
2. communicate effectively, listen to the students and respect their views and choices.
3. uphold the core values of academic advising (e.g. respect, empathy) within PolyU.
4. assist students to identify their academic, career, and personal goals and help them develop plans to achieve these goals.
5. assist students to understand their academic performance and areas of strengths.
6. assist students to understand the graduation requirements and auditing process.
7. keep accurate records of the academic advising session¹.
8. be available to answer the questions of students through different means.
9. make appropriate referrals when necessary.
10. strive for excellence in academic advising.

¹ According to Folsom (2008), "Advising-session notes create a history of advisors' interactions with students. Notes enable advisors to recall salient discussions, actions, and decisions from previous student session, and protect both students and advisors documentation of important decisions, actions, and referrals."

VII. Roles and Responsibilities of Students in Academic Advising

The advisee is an equal partner in the advising process. As advisees, students are ultimately responsible for their educational choices and decisions. Hence, they are expected to:

1. Clarify personal abilities, interests, and goals for academics and life.
2. Contact and schedule regular appointments with their Academic Advisor each year as required or when in need of assistance.
3. Prepare for advising sessions. Understand and review their academic progress before meeting their Academic Advisor. Study the Programme Requirement Document (PRD).
4. Become knowledgeable and adhere to institutional policies, procedures, and requirements.
5. Have an open mind and be ready to consider advice given by teachers, Academic Advisors and other staff.
6. Read their PolyU e-mails and other important communications from the University and their Academic Advisor.
7. Access and use eStudent for academic updates, information updating, registration, and other purposes.
8. Accept final responsibility for all decisions made and their graduation requirements.

VIII. Information for Advising Students on GUR

Information on advising students on GUR (from 2022/23)

1. GUR Framework

For 4-year Degree (4Y) students

Areas	Credits
Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics (AIDA) Requirement	2
Innovation and Entrepreneurship (IE) Requirement	1
Language and Communication Requirements (LCR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English (6 credits) Chinese (3 credits) 	9
Leadership Education and Development (LEAD)	3
Service-Learning (SL)	3
Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 credits from each of the following four cluster areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Nature, Relations and Development (CAR A) Science, Technology and Environment (CAR D) Chinese History and Culture (CAR M) Cultures, Organizations, Societies and Globalisation (CAR N) <p>*Students must also fulfil the Reading and Writing Requirements in English and Chinese</p>	12
Healthy Lifestyle (HLS)	Non-credit bearing
Total	30

For Senior Year Intakes (SY) students

Areas	Credits
Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 credits from CAR (M) “Chinese History and Culture” 3 credits from a specially-designed CAR (A) – English language with English Reading and Writing Requirements Students are required to fulfil the English and Chinese Reading & Writing Requirements 	6
Language and Communication Requirements (LCR) <p>(subject to students’ admission background)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English (6 credits) Chinese (3 credits) 	0-9
Service-Learning (SL)	3
(New) Essential Components of General Education <p>E-modules on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Academic Integrity Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics Innovation and Entrepreneurship National Education 	Non-credit bearing
Total	9 -18

For GUR framework for students admitted in or before 2021/22, please refer to the website of OUS.

2. Study plan for GUR

- GUR is one of the graduation requirements. Students should take GUR subjects according to the progression pattern as indicated in the Programme Requirement Document.
- Students may make adjustment to the GUR study plan according to their own needs and study goals. Students should consider their study load before deciding on taking a CAR subject or not. Generally speaking, the average study load is 15 credits per semester and the maximum study load is 21 credits per semester.
- CAR and SL subjects will be offered in Semester 1, Semester 2 and Summer Term.
- Students should discuss their GUR study plan with their Academic Advisors.

3. Subject Registration for GUR

- Students will need to register for the following GUR in the subject registration period on eStudent:
 - Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR)
 - Service-Learning (SL)
 - English Language and Communication Requirements (Advanced subjects for 4Y students only)
- The rest of the GUR subjects (except HLS) will be pre-assigned by the department. Students should also study the subject description form (SDF) of CAR and SL subjects before registration. Information about GUR could be found in the GUR subjects library.

4. Double-fulfillment of DSR/GUR

- Students completing a DSR subject with double-fulfilment (i.e., also meeting Cluster Area/ Service-Learning Requirements) would not be required to take a CAR/SL subject which the DSR has already been fulfilled.
- However, students must take (an) extra subject(s) to make up the credit requirement. Details of the arrangement could be found in the Programme Requirement Document.

5. Credit Transfer for GUR

- 4Y students may apply for credit transfer for GUR. Application procedures and details could be found in the Student Handbook.
- SY students will not be given further credit transfer for GUR subjects from their previous studies.

6. Waiver for English Reading & Writing (ER/EW) and Chinese Reading & Writing (CR/CW)

- Students may apply for a waiver for ER/EW and CR/CW if they can demonstrate the level of accomplishment as stated in “Guidelines for Credit Transfer of General University Requirements Subjects under the 4-Year Undergraduate Curriculum”.
- SY students who have been given a waiver for ER/EW will still need to take the specially-designed CAR A subject with embedded English Reading and Writing Requirements.
- Application procedures and details could be found in the Student Handbook.

7. Language and Communication Requirements

- English LCR subjects will be assigned according to students’ English language proficiency level.
- All Chinese-speaking students will be required to take the same Chinese LCR subject. Students may choose to take the Cantonese version of Chinese LCR subject. Students taking the Cantonese version of the subject can take an additional 39-hour non-credit bearing e-Learning course in Putonghua in a voluntary manner.
- Non-Chinese speaking students and students whose Chinese standards are at junior secondary level or below would need to take another Chinese Language subject for replacement. They could also be exempted from Chinese Reading and Writing Requirements.

8. Healthy Lifestyle Programme (HLS)

- It is a non-credit bearing subject for 4Y students.
- For details and programme structure of HLS, please refer to the website of OUS.
- Students will register for the necessary components of the Programme via POSS. Email for registration will be sent to students by OUS and SAO.
- Students are advised to complete HLS by the end of Year 2.
- Students who have completed a similar subject/course may be exempted from HLS. Please ask them to contact OUS for details.

9. Points to note for CAR

- 4Y students must take one subject from each of the four cluster areas.
- CAR subjects are at Level 1 and Level 2. Some subjects at Level 2 may require students to complete a prerequisite or a foundation subject first.
- Students may take more than one subject from one cluster area. While grades of all attempted CAR subjects will be counted towards students’ GPA, the subject with the higher grade (if the student takes more than one subject in one cluster area) will be counted towards the Weighted/Award GPA.
- If a student failed a CAR subject, s/he may retake the same subject or choose another subject from the same cluster area in order to meet the requirements.

Students retaking the same subject will have the old grade replaced by the new one. Students taking another subject from the same cluster area will not have the grade replaced.

10. Points to note for Service-Learning (SL) subjects

- Students may choose a Service-Learning subject from their own department or other departments. (Not applicable to students from departments with double-fulfilment of SL)
- Service-Learning is not just volunteer work. It involves course work and assignments.
- Some SL subjects may have an offshore service component. Students should note this when they choose such subjects.
- 4Y students are not allowed to take SL in the first semester of their Year 1 study.
- Some SL subjects require students to indicate their interests on eStudent for a pre-selection process. Students should note the details in the briefing sessions organized by SLLO and/or the emails regarding subject registration by AR.

11. Counting of GUR subject grades in students' GPA

- Grades of all GUR subjects will be counted towards students' GPA.
- The subject level of a GUR subject will affect subject weighting in students' Weighted/Award GPA.

12. Retaking GUR

- Students are not allowed to retake a passed GUR subject.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING
RESOURCE MATERIAL**

The Do's of Academic Advising

1. Attend to the responses of the advisee, including voice, gestures and body language.
2. Confirm your understanding by saying “do you mean ...?” and “I heard that ...”.
3. Have patience and listen to the advisee when he/she speaks.
4. Conduct academic advising in place with minimal distractions.
5. Invite the advisee to respond to your comments and views.
6. Conduct the interviews in a relaxed atmosphere.
7. Have eye contact when you talk to the advisee.
8. Use affirmative head nods and appropriate facial expressions.
9. Respond in a supportive manner.
10. Demonstrate to the advisee that you are involved by asking clarifying or continuing questions.
11. Convey the message that you are available.
12. Maintain a non-defensive body position.
13. Identify feelings and hidden messages behind words.
14. Encourage the advisee to reflect on the conversations and observations of the advisor.
15. Self-disclosure of the advisor is helpful.
16. Use indirect questions to encourage the advisee to determine the direction of the discussion (e.g., “do you have any puzzles about your study?”).
17. Use direct leads to explore specific areas (e.g., “what are your thoughts about service learning?”).
18. Use “zoom in” (e.g., “amongst the concerns you have raised, which one is the most urgent one?”) and “zoom out” (e.g., “are your problems encountered in ‘service learning’ applicable to other areas?”). (Ford, n.d.)
19. Attend appropriate training to equip skills for academic advising, particularly the training/workshops offered by OUS and the e-learning course “Theory and Practice of Academic Advising”.

The Don'ts of Academic Advising

1. Keep on talking without listening to the advisee.
2. Not showing empathy (i.e., not putting oneself in the advisee's place).
3. Not asking questions.
4. Interrupt when the advisee talks.
5. Not attending to what the advisee says.
6. Talking without looking at the advisee (i.e., no eye contact).
7. Have inappropriate smiling and grunting.
8. Letting one's emotions prevent you from listening well.
9. Not controlling one's anger.
10. Let other things distract your attention.
11. Missing the main points and concerns of the advisee.
12. Focus on the issue rather than the person.
13. Not sharing responsibility for communication.
14. Argue mentally while the advisee speaks.
15. Not recognizing the difference in speech rate (about 100 to 150 words per minute) and thinking (about 250 to 500 words per minute).
16. Not listening to the hidden messages (e.g., the hidden emotion of "I do want to take this boring subject" may be anxiety).
17. Not listening to "how" certain messages are said.
18. Antagonizing the advisee (e.g., destructive criticisms, judgmental attitudes).
19. Not understanding the motives and values of the advisee.
20. Jumping to assumptions too quickly (e.g., low academic achievement is a sign of laziness).
21. Over-stereotyping the advisee (e.g., Engineering students have problems in taking service learning programme).
22. Make premature conclusions and judgments.
23. Not aware of one's prejudice.
24. Not aware of faulty reasoning.
25. Not considering facts and evidence.
26. Give the advisee the impression that you are nervous or bored. (Ford, n.d.)

Characteristics of a Good Academic Advisor

A good Academic Advisor shall have the following characteristics:

1. Have personal and professional interest in serving as an Academic Advisor.
2. Attend to the expressed problems of the advisee through constructive listening.
3. Arrange regular meetings to satisfy the advising needs of the students.
4. Have adequate understanding of the University policies, rules and procedures so that students can be provided with accurate and updated information.
5. Make appropriate referral when it is in the best interest of the students.
6. Interact with the students with empathy and a student-centered orientation.
7. Attend to the short-term and long-term needs of the students.
8. Have sharing with colleagues engaging in academic advising work.
9. Strive for continuous improvement.
10. Be willing to participate in advisor-training programmes.(Ford, n.d.)

Assumptions and Limitations of Academic Advising

There are several assumptions of academic advising systems involving teaching staff:

1. Teachers have interests in conducting academic advising on an individual basis.
2. It is most appropriate to invite faculty members to advise students on academic advising.
3. Faculty members have adequate knowledge to guide students to fulfill the requirements of the undergraduate study.
4. Academic advising involving faculty members is the most cost-effective way of providing academic advising.
5. Students desire advice from faculty members regarding their academic study. (Ford, n.d.)

Academic advising is not a panacea for student academic problems. If students have problems other than academic issues, getting additional help from Counsellors in SAO by referral is important. In addition, the success of academic advising does not depend just on the qualities of the Academic Advisor, motivation of students to be engaged in and contribute to the process is also very important. In case you need consultation on academic advising, please contact the Office of Undergraduate Studies.

Thirty Reminders of Effective Advising

1. Care about students as people by showing empathy, understanding, and respect.
2. Establish a warm, genuine, and open relationship.
3. Evidence interest, helpful intent, and involvement.
4. Be a good listener.
5. Establish rapport by remembering personal information about students.
6. Be available; keep office hours and appointments.
7. Provide accurate information.
8. When in doubt, refer to catalogs, advisor's handouts, student handbook, etc. You can also contact the Office of Undergraduate Studies.
9. Know how and when to make referrals, and be familiar with referral sources.
10. Do not refer too hastily; on the other hand, do not attempt to handle situations for which you are not qualified.
11. Have students contact referral sources in your presence.
12. Keep in frequent contact with students; take the initiative; do not always wait for students to come to you.
13. Do not make decisions for students; help them make their own decisions.
14. Focus on students' strengths and potentials rather than limitations.
15. Seek out students in informal settings.
16. Monitor students' progress towards education goals.
17. Determine reasons for poor academic performance and direct students to

appropriate support services.

18. Be realistic with students.
19. Use all available information sources.
20. Clearly outline students' responsibilities.
21. Follow up on commitments made to students.
22. Encourage students to consider and develop conversations for future reference.
23. Keep an anecdotal record of significant conversations for future reference.
24. Evaluate the effectiveness of your advising.
25. Do not be critical of other faculty or staff to students.
26. Be knowledgeable about career opportunities and job outlook for various majors.
27. Encourage students to talk by asking open-ended questions.
28. Do not betray confidential information.
29. Categorize students' questions: seeking action, information, or involvement and understanding.
30. Be yourself and allow students to be themselves (The American College Testing Program, 1979, p. 4.138).

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