

January 2016

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Message from VP and PVC (T&L)



Academic advising is at the heart of HKU's teaching and learning culture. Alongside the many other kinds of advice sought by undergraduate students, all of which are valuable, we hold firm to the view that some advice should be academic. For many students, academic advice may be available from a professor known through class or through an off-campus learning experience. Again we value that. At the same time, though, we are determined to ensure every student has access to solid academic advice, and for that reason we created the academic advising system several years ago.

The core of the system is academic advice provided through faculties and departments. We aim to form this adviser-advisee relationship right at the start of every student's learning journey at HKU. Indeed, freshmen will ideally meet their academic adviser very soon after registration. But even if an early start is not possible, the academic adviser can still help a student think through more general issues such as enhancing learning skills, and making the most of HKU's many off-campus learning opportunities. As the second semester will soon commence, it is a good time for students to review their academic progress with their academic advisers and seek advice on specific matters like study skills, course selection during the add/drop period and choosing majors and minors.



We also provide academic advice through additional channels. Students are welcome to call by the Academic Advising Office at any time. They can request a meeting with a professor in a distant discipline through a temporary advising arrangement. They can take advantage of the academic advising offered through HKU's residential halls and colleges.

The entire system could not function without the dedicated engagement of professors throughout HKU, the outstanding daily support offered by the AAO team, and the oversight provided by colleagues sitting on the Academic Advising Committee. My sincere thanks to them all - and also to the students who, by making full use of the academic advising system, ensure its long-term sustainability.

Professor Ian Holliday
VP and PVC (Teaching & Learning)



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Understanding and Engaging Your Advisees

Freshmen Survey on Academic Advising



Under the University Academic Advising System, first-year students are required to meet with their Faculty Academic Advisers (FAAs) at least once a semester.

However for various reasons, some students were reluctant to do so. In August/September 2015, AAO conducted an online survey among the freshmen to gauge their attitudes towards academic advising with a view to promoting positive advice seeking behaviours. A total of 155 freshmen have completed the survey.

The respondents in general considered academic advising important for their study and welcomed the provision of academic advising at the University. Furthermore, they were aware of their responsibility to initiate contact with their FAAs to discuss their study issues. The topics of high concern to the freshmen include “Course Selection”, “Academic Goal and Study Plan” and “Adjustment to the University Learning Styles”. In addition, students indicated concern about other issues, for example, selection of Common Core courses, academic exchange, management of study load, collaborative skills to handle team projects and balance between study and extra-curricular activities. Although anxiety to meet with teachers alone emerged in previous student focus groups as one major barrier to advice seeking, the result did not indicate high support for group advising. It seemed that one-on-one advising was still the preferred model.

The survey also looked at students’ views on two primary approaches to advising: namely “Developmental” versus “Prescriptive”. Comparing the responses to the two approaches, the respondents

Q: As I begin my University studies, I have the following academic concerns:

	Mean Score
Adjustment to the University learning styles	4.04
Course selection	4.43
Selection of major / minor programmes	3.89
Curriculum structure of my programmes	3.92
Academic goal and study plan	4.04

**5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree*

seemed to show more support for the former, that is, “I want my academic adviser to guide me in finding information about my study and university life, and I will make my own decision”. In contrast, the prescriptive approach was less favoured, receiving a lower score: “I want my academic adviser to contact me, tell me what to do and I will just follow her/his instructions”. This is consistent with the University’s philosophy of academic advising as a developmental process for students. During advising sessions, FAAs could encourage their advisees to reflect critically and make informed study decisions by:

- Asking open-ended questions about her/his university study and listen actively to identify concerns
- Allowing silence for advisee to process information and think over
- Avoiding temptation to decide for advisee
- Questioning misconceptions of advisee
- Guiding advisee to reflect on experience and make better plans

Helping Advisees to Overcome Their Anxiety



Among the various challenges faced by freshmen, not knowing how to communicate with professors is a common phenomenon which might affect their interaction with teachers and overall learning. Through Faculty Student Advisers, AAO collected various doubts and worries of students which helped us understand their reluctance to interact with their adviser:

I am worried ...

How should I greet my Professor? I don't know what the proper manner and tone should be.

My English is terrible, what if Professor could not understand what I said?

Professor might think my questions are silly. What if I made mistakes and ask a wrong question?

My Professor looks very serious. Will he mind me approaching him after class ?

Am I being inconsiderate to ask him question when he is so busy?

To highlight the importance of this issue, AAO conducted a "Freshmen 101" workshop which focused on effective communication with professors. Through role-plays and discussion with our professor speakers, students gained a better



understanding of what teachers expected from them on various occasions (for example, in class, email, meeting outside class time) and the proper ways of approaching their professors. More importantly, the workshop highlighted the significance of effective interaction in nurturing a fruitful teacher-student relationship where learning takes place. In the process, FAAs could also play a part by being friendly, patient and responsive to questions from advisees and guiding them to build a trusting relationship with their advisers.

What should I do ...

My Professor did not reply to my email, how long should I wait?

I don't always understand what my Professor said, should I ask her to repeat?

Do I have to specify the date and time when requesting for a meeting? Is it ok to ask for 30 minutes?

Is it impolite to knock on his door if I know my Professor is in his office?

How to write a proper email?

I have a question, but no one in the class has any questions. Should I raise my hand?

Further resources:

- Sue Ohrablo: "Advising is More Than a Yes/No Business: How to Establish Rapport and Trust with Your Students" (<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/>)
- Jessica Bigger: "Advising First-year Students" (Particularly the part on 'Implications for Academic Advising') (<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/>)
- Margaret Walsh: "How to Make the Most of Your Office Hours" (Particularly the part on 'Seven Ways to Interact with Students During Office Hours') (<http://www.facultyfocus.com/>)

Wise Words . Inspiring . As Always



Getting used to a new environment is always difficult for freshmen like me. A sudden change of atmosphere may sometimes make me feel hard to breathe. Struggling amidst anxiety, I was glad to meet my Faulty Academic Adviser.

Studying Chinese Medicine is extremely challenging for people who know very little about ancient Chinese philosophy, for instance, the *Five Movements* (金木水火土) and the *Yin-Yang* theory (陰陽). Although I have studied one more year of associate degree, I thought I was still a rookie who just made the first step towards the field of Chinese Medicine which has a deep and profound history. Everything was going left until the day I received the email from my adviser.



In that afternoon we met, (to be honest) I felt it was quite awkward to tell my difficulty to a man I just got to know. Fortunately, he did not force me to talk a lot, he played an active role instead. "The best way to learn is to stay closely involved." What he said made me feel he could read my mind — this is the first impression I have for him.

Time flies. Finally it is the end of year 1. We did not meet very frequently (4 times in total), but when we did, he provided the guidance I need. From time to time, he sent me messages to ask about my academic progress. This summer, he bought me a book 《中國哲學簡史》 — I have finished more than half and it triggers me to read more. Moreover, he had offered me referrals of learning *Tai Chi* (太極) when I asked. These are just a few examples of those supports he has given me this year. When I was anxious about my academic performance, he reminded me "More haste, Less speed" (欲速則不達). Wise words. Inspiring, as always. Therefore, here I must convey my gratitude to my adviser for his guidance throughout this year.

Louis Wong | Year 1 (2014-15)
Bachelor of Chinese Medicine

A Life-changing Experience



The “Five ‘Must-dos’ in University” are “Studying, Living in Halls, Becoming a Member of An Executive Committee, Doing Part-time Job and Dating” (大學五件事: 讀書, 住Hall, 上莊, 兼職, 拍拖), many students said. Yet few of those 5 things are really academic related. It is common for freshmen to ‘get lost’ in University, sometimes you really just don’t know what you should do. Students struggle with course selection, career prospect, GPA, etc., and most of them tend to look for answers just from their peers, who might not have a clear understanding of your particular situation, or might simply be too busy to listen to you. I was once lost, and I knew that it was meaningless to keep asking my friends, my seniors, and pray for some good feedback.

I have decided to give academic advising a try. It may sound a bit exaggerated, but I would say academic advising is life-changing. Not only did I map out my academic plan with my academic adviser for the first semester in year 1, we have also discussed future career prospect, exchange opportunities, and luckily I could even share my experiences in another language course with my adviser since she speaks that language as well!



With the help of academic advising, I was able to have a splendid semester and passed with flying colours!

Some students might say that they have no problem with studying and academic advising is unnecessary. Some might even discourage other students from meeting with their advisers. I hold a different view because, from my adviser, I know that academic advising involves much more than just coping with studies. Academic advising has made a difference in my university life, and I am sure I am not the only one who has benefited by that. Salute to all advisers!

Arnold Chiu | Year 1 (2014-15)
Bachelor of Science



From time to time, AAO receives questions related to student advising from FAAs. In each issue of our newsletter, we will select some cases for sharing possible approaches to guide advisees in resolving issues and attaining growth. If you have any questions or cases to share, please send them to advisingcorner@hku.hk.

Balance between Study and Hall Life

My advisee David resides in hall, the first time he lives away from his family. When we met, he looked very tired. He told me about the serious difficulties he had in catching up with his readings and assignments as he had to devote a lot of time to the hall sports teams and cultural groups. David felt the strong peer pressure to conform to the hall culture but he did not want to talk to anyone in his hall. As he slept for 3-4 hours a day, he worried if he could go on without affecting his grades. He sought my view whether he should quit hall immediately. Personally I believe in the value of hall education. How should I advise David?



AAO suggests

What David experienced is not uncommon among students who live in halls, though the degree of pressure varies depending on the attitude and personality of the individual. As there must be a reason why he chose to live in a hall, before he quits, he should talk to his hall tutor about his problem to explore possible solutions. Secondly he could get some peer advice from his hall's Residential Student Adviser (RSA) on how to balance study and hall life. In fact, freshmen often experience adjustment stress from different sources in their transition from secondary to university study, hence demand from hall activities may not be the only cause of his distress. David could make an appointment to see an AAO adviser to review his study plan as well as CEDARS-CoPE counsellor to examine his time management and other social skills. You may also invite him to share his progress with you to show your support. The contact information of AAO and CEDARS are listed in the Smart Guide for FAAs and AAO website.

So far you have done a great job for David to confide his worries to you, so take this opportunity to help him learn important life skills that could be put to good use in future.

Lack of Interest in Current Programme

Alice is my first-year advisee. She is a quiet girl and did not say much about herself in our first meeting. Three weeks ago, she showed up at my office and told me that she has little interest in her study programme and would like to apply for programme transfer. The courses she has taken were not what she has expected and she wanted to take more practical courses in order to work in the business field after graduation.

As an adviser, I always encourage students to make their own decision and take ownership of their study. However, I think Alice's decision is a hasty and impulsive one. She needs more time to explore and understand the subject she is studying. How should I advise her?



AAO suggests

The first year in University is really a time for exploration and adjustment. Most students have different expectations when they enroll in a particular study programme. You could encourage Alice to find out more about her courses, explore her real interest and study for a longer period before she reaches a conclusion. The University's open curriculum allows students to select a second major or minor across Faculties. If she wishes to apply for transfer to a different programme, she also needs to understand more about other field of subjects (e.g. nature of study, course requirement, career prospects, etc.) by talking to a Temporary Academic Adviser (TAA). TAAs are teachers in different Faculties appointed to give specific programme information for home and non-home students to explore Major/Minor options. Alice can request for a TAA easily via SIS.

Apart from interests, the motivation to study may be affected by academic performance, study habits, self-confidence or other personal reasons. Do encourage Alice to reflect on her learning experience and identify issues she needs to tackle. Programme transfer may not be the only and the best solution for her. You are welcome to refer her to AAO for a consultation. As for career planning, remind Alice that the relationship between study and career is not necessarily a linear one. Her academic skills and knowledge could be applied in different fields and she can always consult CEDARS Careers counsellor for guidance and advice.



What's Happening ?

Advising for Student Success @ HKU



To promote academic advising to new teaching staff, AAO participated in a programme organized by the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL), Introduction to Teaching and Learning @ HKU, on September 8, 2015. AAO's presentation provided new teachers with information about the core values underpinning the academic system at HKU, the essential relationship between academic advising and teaching and learning as well as what teachers could do in support of academic advising.

The Essentials of Academic Advising @ HKU

To provide updates on academic advising and advising resources, a lunchtime workshop with participation of 40 staff across different Faculties was held on September

30, 2015. A wide range of topics were covered in the workshop, such as first year students' perception of academic advising, types of academic advisers at the University, essential information about the academic advising system, updated advising tools and campus resources, etc. Through sharing on non-local student cases, speaker and participants discussed the unique academic and socio-cultural challenges faced by this student group.

AAO's New Smart Guide for Faculty Academic Advisers

This new Smart Guide summarizes the essential advising information and campus resources for FAA's quick reference during advising sessions. FAAs could refer to the hard copy sent to their office in September or the e-copy posted on AAO website. (http://intraweb.hku.hk/reserved_2/aaoffice/user_guide/smart_guide.pdf)



When Major Meets Minor Fair 2016



To provide an opportunity for students to explore different major and minor options available at the

University, the When Major Meets Minor Fair 2016 will be organized on **January 21, 2016**. Inform your advisees to watch out for further details on the AAO Website (<http://aao.hku.hk>).

When Major meets Minor

Face-to-Face Consultation with AAO Academic Advisers • Faculty Administrators • Careers Advisers
Talk on Major / Minor Selection and Careers Planning

DATE: January 21, 2016 (Thursday)
TIME: 11:00 am to 4:00 pm
VENUE: Ground Floor, Chi Wah Learning Commons, Centennial Campus

Who is it for?
All students, particularly Year 1 and Year 2 students

What is it for?
For exploring different major and minor options at HKU

What can I get?

- One-on-One advising sessions
- Factsheets of all major/ minor options
- Careers Advice

DON'T MISS OUR SPECIAL TALK!!
Choose A Major and Plan Your Career
January 21 (12:45 – 2:00pm)
at University Bookstore
Registration: <http://aao.hku.hk/majorminor>