

## **Getting the Most Out of Your Advising Relationship**

Academic advising is the most underutilized resource on many college campuses. Many students don't truly realize what academic advising is, and what it can do to help them prepare for the world beyond college. Here are some general hints and tips to help you get the most out of your relationship with your academic advisor.

### **Tip 1: Recognize that college is different from high school.**

This seems like an obvious one, right? In high school you are in school for 7-8 hours every day, taking the same classes each day. Typically you have many small assignments, and a test on the material every week or so. In college, you may have class only 2-3 days a week, and each day brings a different class. You may only have 1-2 graded assignments in the class (in addition to the reading of course!) and maybe 2-3 graded exams for the entire semester. But the differences are even bigger than that.

### **High School life vs. College life:**

State law forces you to attend high school vs. you now have to motivate yourself to attend class.

Most high school students live at home with their families vs. you now live in a dorm with new people from different walks of life.

Daily contact with your teachers builds a relationship quickly vs. bi-weekly contact with your professor puts relational responsibility on you.

What does this mean for you – you will need to find resources at Westmont to help you learn to navigate the new environment. Though your advisors cannot and will not parent you, they do know about many of the resources here and can point you in the right direction. All it requires is initiative on your part.

### **Tip 2: Advising is a relationship**

Many students will only see their advisor just before they need to register for classes for the next semester. That means that most students only see their advisors twice a year for 30-45 minutes!

Just as with any other relationship, it takes time and effort to establish. Can you imagine wanting to develop a friendship with another person, but only seeing them for 45 minutes a year? How can they get to know you? How can they make suggestions and take your interests into account when they don't have the chance to get to know you?

There are many ways that Westmont tries to support developing this relationship with your advisor.

First and foremost, if you had an interest in a major when you entered as a first year student, you were assigned to an advisor within that department. This was in the hopes that there would be a common academic interest between you and your advisor.

Advisors are also professors within their departments, so another great way to get some natural face time with them is by being a student in one of their classes. This way, you will

see them 2-3 times each week, they will get to know your name and face, and when you meet one-on-one there will be a shared experience that you can talk about.

Another method of deepening the advisor/advisee relationship is done through the “Take a Professor to Lunch” program that the Student Life office provides. Schedule a time in advance with your advisor, then you can treat him/her to the Dining Commons for lunch. Over lunch you can chat about anything that comes to mind: major decisions, class topics, your life and struggles, so that your professor can get to know you a bit better. That way, when you meet for your advising meetings to register for classes, your professor can help you choose classes that might best suit your needs.

### **Tip 3: Your advisors are people too**

Though your advisors and professors may be intimidating at first, it is important to remember that they are people too. And they will often take their cues from you on what kind of help you need and how engaged you are with their courses and the advising process.

If you do the minimal amount of work in meeting with them (i.e. coming late or missing meetings, coming unprepared with questions, concerns, interests and options to talk through) then they may make the assumption that you don't need their help beyond a simple check of your proposed schedule. You may meet with advisors who are great at the advising piece of their job, and do the work to pull these topics out of you through conversation. You may also meet others that are not able to delve deeper into what makes you tick. Whatever the issue, make sure that you recognize how important each person is in the process as you work on developing your relationship.

### **Tip 4: Your advisors are busy people**

Just as your advisors are people too, it is also important to recognize that they get busy, stressed and tired just like you do.

Your advisors don't just teach you in the classroom, though this is their main function. All professors teach and grade for 3 classes each term, have their own research going on (which is required of all faculty), have their advising and administrative loads, plus families and often children at home. They are being pulled in many directions.

So just at the point where you are tired of writing a paper or taking a test, think of the number of students in your class and the number of hours your professor will need to spend grading that work. Then make sure that when you meet with them, you are using both of your time well!

### **Tip 5: Your advisors are here to help**

Advisors are there to help you navigate the Westmont scene, but they can only do so with initiative on your part. They will not require you to see them at any point in the semester except when you register for next semesters classes. So if you don't seek them out, they may not seek you out.

Advisors have 5 office hours set aside every week for their advisees and students in their class to come and see them. They vary these hours across the week so that they can be available to as many students as possible. These hours are posted outside of their office

doors, and on all of their syllabi. Their hours may change from semester to semester. These are the easiest times to catch them in their office each week.

If your schedule conflicts with their office hours, let them know and try to schedule an alternate time. Give them enough time in the week to get back to you and confirm the appointment. If you don't hear from them via e-mail, try calling their office and leaving a voicemail message for them. Be persistent, but not pushy. Remember that they are busy too! As a last resort, talk to their administrative assistant and see what the best method is for getting a hold of them. You may also want to try taking them to lunch using the "Take a Prof to Lunch" cards mentioned above.

We hope that these tips will help you as you seek to develop your relationship with your advisor. Once a connection is made, your advisor can be a great source of information, encouragement and support as you navigate the next few years towards your Westmont degree!