

General Studies/Undecided Workgroup Recommendations

Overview

We identified the sub-populations in General Studies and recommend placing students in an academic school based on information gathered during GPS appointments and creating a student attribute for each subpopulation that will appear in Degree Works for tracking purposes. The largest subpopulations in General Studies are as follows:

- a. Pre-Health related field (students working on pre-requisites—we anticipate many students in this group may enter the Health Sciences program once approved by SUNY and State Ed.)
 - b. Truly undecided (approximately 160-180 incoming General Studies students in fall 2019 were identified as some level of undecided.)
 - c. Students planning to transfer to a program we don't have
 - d. Leaning toward Psychology/social work
 - e. Leaning toward Business-related field
1. **“Truly undecided” vs. students leaning toward an area of study:** The workgroup distinguishes between students who indicate an interest in an area of study from those who are truly undecided. Students who indicate a strong interest in an area of study, but are uncertain about a specific major, should be identified with an academic school with an attribute. For example, “General Studies for Business.” They could be assigned advisors in that discipline, and these students could utilize advising guides and transfer agreements for General Studies linked to a more specific program at the bachelor-level.

An attribute should be created for students identified as “exploring” (truly undecided) and we recommend offering specialized programming to meet the needs of this population. This specialized programming may be offered in the form of an individualized student success course/first year seminar taken in place of CF 100 and that emphasizes the psychology of decision making and career exploration.

The workgroup recommends offering guided exploration for students who are undecided. The General Studies curriculum allows students the opportunity to explore different disciplines, but students should be required meet with an advisor before registering for classes to reduce the risk of accumulating credits that won't transfer. We need to maximize the credits earned for transfer and decrease time to completion

2. **First Year Experience:** Convocation/Orientation and First Year Seminar

- a. **First Year Seminar**—we recommend a “school” based first year seminar and an individualized student-success course experience for truly undecided students. The specialized first-year seminar should integrate career counselling/exploration, job shadowing opportunities, and routine reflection. SSA's can encourage these students to choose this offering if they are truly undecided.

This could be an extended CF100 (2 credits instead of 1) to fit in more career exploration and self-reflection to help with the decision-making process. It would allow more time for undecided students to reflect (in writing) on goals and exploration of careers and majors. Consider having SSA or career person to teach a particular CF100 if we are trying to create CF100s based on schools. Create orientation/training for CF100 instructors.

3. **General Studies Program Curriculum** – Consider converting the degree to an A.A., which would increase the number of General Education credits required, while decreasing the number of free-electives.
4. **Centralize student information**—preferably with a single-sign on for documenting interactions with students. Practice consistent documentation/tracking of student support and progress by utilizing a shared information system (Degree Works) that houses degree plan and student profile information. (Results of intake survey, etc. two-year plan of study,)
 - a. Reconfigure Degree Works to mirror the semester-by-semester program map or individualized academic plan
5. **Advising:** Incoming students who are truly undecided need to be identified early and have more frequent and more intensive face-to-face contact with SSAs.
 - a. **Assigning advisors:** We recommend working toward a more intentional assignment of faculty advisors and SSAs for General Studies students. We recommend using information gathered at GPS appointments to assign advisors who specialize in students’ area of interest (for those who indicate interest in an area). For example, students who indicate a desire to enter health-related fields should be assigned advisors who teach under the School of Health Studies. We recommend tracking the progress of these students closely.
 - b. Allow new and/or undecided students to play an active role in developing an academic plan and a first semester schedule during the GPS appt. This may allow them to feel more connected/trusting of their advisor, and more in control of their plan -- they will be able to take ownership of it, and maybe have more motivation to continue to develop it.
 - c. GPS appointments: increase length of GPS appointment for students that we identify as truly undecided or leaning, or multi-part appointment. Currently GPS appointments are usually scheduled for 1 hour.
 - d. Require or incentivize students to meet with an advisor prior to registering for classes, to review their degree plan to ensure they are “staying on the path” either by placing holds, or requiring an advisor’s signature. This would force students to meet with an advisor for a more direct contact and discussion, especially since students (if they are in good standing) can essentially make whatever schedule

they want after the new student hold is removed. Another way around this is building one-year schedules for students.

- e. **Developing an individualized academic plan** —working with their seminar instructor, SSA, and/or faculty advisor, students should create a two year academic plan as part of CF 100 that works backward from a desired career/transfer goals.
- f. Utilize transfer advising guides from transfer schools for students who are “leaning” toward a given area of study. During this exploratory stage, SSAs and Faculty advisors can use advising guides to suggest electives for students.

6. Other programming/career counselling for undecided students

- a. Offer career counseling workshops and perhaps an online version of the workshop for GS students. Make sure this information is widely marketed; encourage CF100 instructors to offer extra credit for completing it, or build it into a requirement for the course
 - b. Bring in professionals for career oriented panels or presentations. Students could hear what it is really like to be a criminal investigator, social worker, nurse, etc. These events could be funded through student activities or wherever DGV event money comes from.
 - c. Provide Job shadowing opportunities for students—and consider making this a requirement for students enrolled in the specialized First-year seminar.
7. **Work with High Schools/Dual Credit:** share advising guides/program maps for dual credit with guidance counselors, instructors, and students so they know how their credits might transfer to specific programs. If possible, begin advising process in the high schools to maximize credits earned through dual credit program.

References:

- Gordon, Virginia, "The Undecided Student: A Developmental Perspective" (1981)
- "Career Decidedness Types: A Literature Review" (1998)
- Ellis, Kyle C. Academic Advising Experiences of First-Year Undecided Students: A Qualitative Study" (2014)
- Kay Leach, "Need Supportive Advising for Undecided Students" (2016)

Advising Undeclared Students

<https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-Undeclared-Students.aspx>

Undecided Student Best Practices Handout

<https://advising.ucsc.edu/advisers/forum/docs/2014/Undecided%20-%20Best%20Practices%20Handout.pdf>

Advising Undecided Students: What Works Best?

<https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/old/articles/020916ks.htm>

Improving Academic Success for Undecided Students: A First-Year Seminar/Learning Community Approach

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1112851.pdf>

THE PLIGHT OF THE UNDECIDED STUDENT

<https://www.naceweb.org/career-development/special-populations/the-plight-of-the-undecided-student/>

Establishing Effective Advising Practices to Influence Student Learning and Success

<https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/establishing-effective-advising-practices-influence-student>