

Initiatives Advising Workshop Guidelines

Semester 2: Agency

*The focus of the Initiatives advising workshop for Semester 2 is to promote **the development of student agency**. The students will have generated responses to specific prompts (given below), which we would like you to use in your workshop. It is up to you how you structure the discussion, but we have provided an example for your consideration.*

The Initiatives advising workshop will be held from 9:00 - 10:20 a.m. on March 21, 2012 (the Advising Practicum). You will meet your students in the same room that you used during New Student Days.

In preparation for this workshop, students will respond to the prompts that follow. On Wednesday, March 14, they will be sent an email with a link to an online submission form. Their responses are due by midnight on March 18. You will have access to their responses online; please read them in preparation for the workshop. **Note that in each of their first three semesters, students must complete these writing assignments and attend the workshop in order to receive credit for the Initiatives advising workshop and apply for Venture Grants.** Please ensure that students are aware of these stipulations.

Students should plan to spend at least an hour responding to the following prompts:

Part I

1. Identify one specific learning experience from the current semester that was especially meaningful and memorable—something that you think will have lasting impact on you. Explain why it had such an effect on you, and how you think it will affect your life in the future.
2. Identify two specific learning goals you have for the semester ahead at Beloit College, and explain how you may be able to achieve them and what will be required of yourself and others to do so.

Part II

A Beloit education focuses on the practice of the liberal arts, where “practice” incorporates three interrelated senses: (1) repetition toward improvement (e.g., “They all look forward to soccer practice,” or “He practiced his Chinese pronunciation for more than an hour yesterday”); (2) cultivation of habits of mind and body (e.g., “She makes a regular practice of writing in her journal”); and (3) application of ideas, skills, and perspectives (e.g., “Her summer job in a research lab enabled her to put into practice the knowledge and skills she had acquired through her classes”). All three forms of practice demand your active and thoughtful engagement in envisioning and actualizing your own educational trajectory. The prompts below are meant to aid you in this process.

1. In what specific situations over the past year have you felt the greatest sense of investment in and ownership of your educational process? Why did you feel that way? Can you think of ways to actively cultivate that feeling more often?
2. What ideas or activities have most excited your curiosity and interest over the past semester, such that you have been motivated to pursue them independently—beyond formal (classroom, club, or team) expectations? How might you put those ideas or activities into practice in one or more of the senses outlined above? How might those ideas or activities shape your educational and life trajectory?
3. How would you describe the habits of thought, belief, feeling, or action that characterize your experience of work, play, and life thus far at Beloit College? Which habits would you like to cultivate further between now and graduation, and which would you like to change? Explain why you want to cultivate or change these habits, and how you might go about doing so.

This assignment serves three purposes:

- It enables students to reflect on their past learning experiences and their aspirations for the future at a time when those experiences and aspirations can help to inform their decisions about courses and college life.
- It enables you as their advisor in the liberal arts to learn more about students’ educational experiences and goals, and to use that information to help them plan for the semester ahead.
- It enables the Initiatives Program to conduct research on student learning, and to continue to improve the success of the program in helping students to achieve their learning objectives.

Guidelines for the workshop

The workshop should enable students to explore collaboratively the implications of their responses to these prompts for the decisions that they must make in the week and months ahead, and thus to participate in the remaining portions of the Advising Practicum and in individual advising meetings with a sense of purpose and a specific set of questions or goals. What follows is one model for structuring such a workshop; feel free to deviate from it as you think best, but please do engage students' responses to the prompts.

You might also consider asking students to come to the workshop with a list of 6-10 courses in which they have an interest (see especially B. below).

A. Enable students to reacclimate to the group while fostering reflection on what it means to take agency for one's own education (20 minutes)

Your FYI students may not have talked together as a group for a couple of months. In the full group, ask them to to reflect on the learning experiences in which they feel the strongest sense of investment, excitement, and self-motivation, drawing on their responses to I.1 and/or II.1 and 2. Depending on your group, be sure either to limit the time devoted to each student's response to about a minute, or to solicit responses from a strategically chosen sub-group of students. (Remember, you will have read their responses in advance.)

B. Relate the discussion of taking agency and the notion of *practicing the liberal arts* to students' short- and long-term interests, goals, concerns, and challenges (20 minutes)

Place students in groups of three (or groups of two, as necessary to accommodate all students). Remind students that "practice" incorporates three interrelated senses: (1) repetition toward improvement; (2) cultivation of habits of mind and body; and (3) application of ideas, skills, and perspectives. In light of each student's (self-reported) responses to prompts I. 2 and II. 3, ask each group to discuss the students' current (and likely tentative) vision of their educational trajectory, and what forms of practice (in all three senses) might be conducive to realizing that trajectory. In light of that discussion, have each student write down two or three choices s/he needs to consider now in order to get the most out of the semester and years to come. These choices could include desired and required varieties of coursework (even if students haven't yet looked at available courses) and extra-classroom opportunities, as well as choices regarding lifestyle or social interaction. Remind students to divide time equally among the students in the group. Make yourself explicitly available to all groups if they have questions about opportunities, resources, deadlines, etc.

C. Report on educational trajectory and choices (15 minutes)

After ensuring that students who might be confused, uncertain, or overwhelmed feel supported in saying so (e.g., by stating explicitly that it's perfectly okay at this stage to be uncertain about your educational trajectory and short-term choices), have each student report briefly on his or her tentative educational trajectory and the most important choices s/he will consider for the semester ahead. If the workshop atmosphere is conducive to it, you and the other students can make suggestions and ask questions of each student.

D. Formulate a course of action for the Advising Practicum and Advising Week (remaining time)

Have each student write down the sessions s/he wants to attend for the remainder of the day. Make specific recommendations to students based on their writing and the workshop discussions. Give all students instructions on how to prepare for your individual advising meetings with them (e.g., by composing/revising an academic plan for the years ahead, choosing 6-10 attractive courses, writing down questions or concerns in advance, etc.). Have students sign up for individual advising appointments (optional for students who have already declared, but encourage those students whom you think would benefit from a follow-up conversation).

Note: This workshop format focuses on using group discussion of written responses to formulate goals and questions for the remainder of the Advising Practicum and advising week as a whole. Note, however, that you will also be able to read students' responses in advance. Please consider how best to advise them in light of those responses, including making specific recommendations to or asking pertinent questions of particular students in order to help them get the most out of the Practicum and make informed and satisfying choices for the semester ahead.