

Advising Best Practices: Some Tips for Effective Relationships with your Advisees
Recommended by participants in TEAM (Team Enhanced Advising and Mentoring)

1. Schedule enough time for a meaningful discussion at the first advising meeting.

In your first meeting, take a less structured approach, allowing ample time to get to know what matters to your advisee beyond academics: family obligations, activities, athletics, etc. Advisees need to understand that their academic advisor is concerned not only with their academic performance and journey, but also with their “whole person,” and first and foremost with their well-being. When you meet, show interest in their endeavors, support their initiatives, and celebrate their achievements and accomplishments. Make room for them to tell you what *isn't* going so well. Most importantly, make your advisees feel comfortable talking to you about themselves. Try to have a well-rounded understanding of your advisees.

2. Schedule a follow-up meeting into your calendar and initiate contact periodically.

Don't wait for your advisees to contact you; sometimes, they won't be comfortable taking that role, or they may be embarrassed to seem as if they need something. You might want to schedule several meetings early in the semester, so that there's time to modify the level or kind of courses early. Set up at least one group meeting beyond the initial one. This can be very brief—e.g., an hour for cookies or pizza in the late afternoon, for students to stop by and talk. This can be a good occasion to prompt individual advisees to share how they accomplished something (“Wow, that's a great campus job, how did you find it?”).

Send at least one (ideally more than one) personal email(s) per term. You can include things like reminders about upcoming deadlines, but it's important that the notes are also somewhat personal. You might inquire about things like how a particular course is going, whether or not a student has accessed a TA or tutor, or how a bumpy roommate situation is progressing. And when you hear/hear back from your advisees, make sure you write back to them!

If your advisees are in your course, that affords you a good opportunity to casually ask them how things are going. This frequent and casual contact allows you to stay current on their activities and build the relationship more naturally.

3. Refer them to a specific person.

If you need to refer an advisee to someone (a dean, a professor, an office), try to send them to a *particular person*—a specific academic or student life dean, a contact person in an office, etc. If you're not sure who would be the best referral, ask any dean in the DOC or OSL. Students often find the number of deans/advisors/faculty overwhelming,

and intimidating to navigate. Even giving the students a couple of names within the same office is better than sending them away with none.

Familiarize yourself with the advising, academic support, and general support services on campus. This information is in the *Advisor Handbook*, among other publications, and is also in a number of places on the Brown website.

4. Work to counter (mis)perceptions such as “no one else has difficulty” or “seeking help signifies failure.” Discredit negative stereotypes. Display positive expectations for excellent performance.

- a. **Reassure them that everybody initially struggles** to adjust to college and find a sense of belonging in a new community; these feelings are common and short-lived.
- b. Remind them that, going from high school to a college as selective as Brown, they should **expect to be challenged while they transition**. They shouldn't expect Brown to be as easy as high school. Even for subjects that they know, college is an entirely different game from what they have been used to, and things often move at warp speed.

Let them know that it is wise to shop several courses to determine which level fits best, and that it is generally better to gain confidence in a foundation course than to drown in a course that is presently over their head.

Impress on them that all students should evaluate their work habits from high school. Study habits and practices that work in high school will not work for college. For example, in high school, high-achieving students may have taken the initiative to read every single page assigned to them. College syllabi often include a huge amount of reading, with the expectation that the student will digest the bulk of it, but not read every word. Doing things last-minute will generally work against them, whereas it may have worked reasonably well in high school. Emphasize that professors expect students to meet course expectations in a timely fashion, so that they can ask pertinent questions about readings, assignments, and exams.

- c. **Remind them they deserve to be at Brown.** They don't have to prove that they're smart because they already have. Stress that performance is about how efficiently and effectively they work, and how they can make the most out of the resources—people and services—around them. The aim here is to remove any perceived stigma around getting help and using services. Tell them they are here to take full advantage of all that Brown offers to help students academically, such as tutoring, teaching assistants, instructor office hours, academic deans, etc. And, far from being shameful, it's an act of strength to ask for help when it's

needed. Help and support-seeking are in fact integral to being an excellent student. Students make use of these resources even when they are doing well in their work—in fact, that is often *why* they are doing well.

- d. Students often think they're not supposed to "bother" an advisor or instructor with a personal issue that is taking a toll on academic performance. We can never stress enough to our advisees that they need to communicate (though they need not share the details) if there's a problem.

5. Remove ambiguity about your role as an advisor and your interest in helping them achieve the goals they set for themselves. Define your role clearly, so that your advisees think of contacting you.

An advisor is their **first point** of reference and the person who can lead them to the right resources. You are not expected to know everything, but rather to demonstrate a willingness to help students find their way to what they need within the Brown community.

Make your office a "judgment-free zone."

6. Consult with colleagues and deans.

If a student is having difficulties and you're not sure how to help, consult with a dean, or with more experienced advisors or colleagues.

Use your Meiklejohn Peer Advisor whenever appropriate. Connect advisees with other students, especially upperclassmen. Combined advising lunches with sophomore and first-year advisees work well for this.

7. Keep antennae out for students' background characteristics that might affect their transition to college: family, neighborhood, culture, immigration history, socioeconomic status, illness/health history.

8. Evaluate the quality of interaction(s) that you are having with an advisee early: Are you being attentive? Accessible? Challenging yet affirming?

Ask yourself, beyond the list of courses they are taking:

- a. "What else do I know about their Brown experience, and how did I learn it?" If you haven't already, set the goal of learning one thing that your advisee is doing that is not a classroom-based. Consider arranging to witness/comment on this engagement. (E.g., write a note about their column in the BDH, go see them in a game or performance, hear their music, etc.)

- b. Do you regularly discuss topics beyond academics?
- c. Do you interact in a way that shows that you believe students have the capacity to improve and learn? That you believe in the expandability and incremental nature of intelligence, rather than in fixed ability?
- d. Do you give the “benefit of the doubt” when you can?