CUNY Start Advisement — Core Values and Practices

CUNY Start advisors work with students both individually and in a weekly seminar, assisting them in reaching academic and personal goals. In both contexts, CUNY Start advisors employ the discovery-based approach used throughout CUNY Start. Their content is “college knowledge” and personal decision-making, and their goals overlap with those of CUNY Start academics – to improve student’s communication, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Rather than being prescriptive, advisors engage students in a self-reflective process that helps them to assess their physical and social context, individual strengths and challenges that may prevent them from realizing academic and other aspirations. Once students gain fuller self-awareness, advisors teach a problem-solving process, scaffolding the steps, as is done in academic classes. Students learn to assess their problem-solving strategies, and revise them as needed.

Following are the core practices CUNY Start advisors use to help students improve self-awareness, communication, problem-solving and self-advocacy skills.

**Individual Advisement**

- Helping students increase self-awareness, by asking questions about student’s choices and results of actions taken.

- Using non-judgmental, non-punitive language, such as asking questions about progress made toward goals, as opposed to imparting advice or discussing what students “should” do.

- Asking questions to guide students to eliminate or mitigate obstacles to learning or goal achievement.

- Guiding students to use referrals and advocate for themselves, through a step-by-step process of understanding resources, making and preparing for appointments, and follow-up.

- De-scaffolding support provided to students, by gradually releasing intensity of guidance and encouraging students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning and development, based on each student’s readiness.

- Demonstrating empathy, such as listening to student’s challenges before engaging in problem-solving with them.

- Maintaining clear boundaries and holding students to high standards, by communicating student’s fulfillment of program expectations through individual meetings, team meetings and written communication.

- Regularly acknowledging and congratulating students on achievements, regardless on the size of accomplishments.
Using a “from the cradle to the grave” approach with students, from the point of initial contact during recruitment to departure, assisting students with next steps regardless of whether they complete, withdraw or are dismissed from the program; even dismissal presents an opportunity to improve self-awareness and problem-solving skills and is done without judgment.

**Seminar**

- Incorporating academic skills into every lesson, including tests, written assignments and mathematical computations.
- Providing opportunities for practice, such as applying for Financial Aid or selecting courses using the college catalogue.
- Providing opportunities for students to speak as experts, such as presenting information about their college major, the culmination of an extensive research project.
- Engaging in in-depth examination of college topics, such as a two-month research project into college majors and related careers, emphasizing academic skills such as research methods as well as “college knowledge.”
- Introducing college norms and expectations, such as policies outlined in college syllabi.
- Using questions to help students think critically about information presented.
- Expanding students’ vocabulary necessary to understand and utilize college systems.
- Emphasizing process, such as asking students to explain how they arrived at their conclusions.
- Circulating to work with individuals and groups, providing individual support.
- Scaffolding complex activities, by breaking them into a series of smaller activities.