

An Advising Model for Undecided Students

The following is an excerpt from the article, *Advising Undecided/Exploratory Students* by Virginia Gordon, Assistant Dean, Emerita, The Ohio State University. The full article is part of *Academic Advising for Student Success and Retention™*, a video-based workshop for advisors, faculty, and professional staff.

Advisors who follow a decision-making model when advising undecided students can ensure that all the necessary steps will be covered. The model below follows a sequence of steps that leads the student through an orderly decision-making process. This plan may be used in a 30-minute advising session or over an extended period of time.

Step 1: Help students analyze their situation

- How undecided is the student (e.g., deciding between two alternatives, totally undecided)?
- Why are they undecided? (The reasons they give will often suggest a place to start gathering information.)
- What majors are they considering? What majors have they eliminated? (If they can't answer either question, you can go through a complete list of your institution's majors and

offer explanations of each; in this way you can help the student eliminate many majors.)

- Be sensitive to sex-role stereotyping in the alternatives they name.
- Listen for students' values; discuss how these might be important for identifying alternatives.
- A trusting advising relationship needs to be established. The first contact is critical.

Step 2: Help students organize a plan for exploring (information gathering phase)

- What type of information do they need (e.g., self-information, academic information, occupational information, decision-making information)?
- Devise a plan for gathering information (where? how? when?). To what campus resources do they need to be referred (e.g., people, libraries, computer systems, career center)?
- Establish a timeline for accomplishing the tasks in this step.

Step 3: Help students integrate information they have collected

- Integrate self-information (e.g., interests, abilities, values, experi-

ences, skills) into possible majors/occupational fields.

- Help them understand academic and occupational relationships, including majors that lead to many occupational possibilities.
- Help them understand how different majors fit their values and goals.
- Broaden their horizons.
- Help them narrow down their options to two or three possibilities.

Step 4: Support students while they make decisions

- Offer feedback on how the decision-making process is progressing.
- Help identify external factors that need to be considered.
- Help students understand their decision-making style and how it affects the process.
- Support their decision once it is made.

Step 5: Help students initiate an action plan

- Help identify specific action steps to be taken.
- Help identify resources needed to take action.
- Help set up a realistic timetable for taking specific actions.
- Remind students that no plan is static; as changes take place, new deci-

sions may need to be made.

Step 6: Encourage future contact

- Explain that you are available if they need to assess further or update their decision.
- Remind them that your role is one of support, that you are willing to act as a sounding board for future decisions, and that you will provide continuity and stability as needed.

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