Statement of Advising Philosophy
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The loosely structured Women’s Studies major offers students significant freedom and intellectual satisfaction, but requires that they take a fair bit of responsibility for their progress to degree; I see my job as creating the conditions within which they can successfully shoulder that responsibility. Using technology effectively has enabled our program to counter the default stance within the university that “the information is out there and it’s the students’ responsibility to find it.” A statement like that is not inaccurate: college and university policies are available on their respective web pages, current degree and tracking requirements can be found in annual catalogues, classes that count for WST each term appear in the registrar’s course listings, and ISIS shows students (sort of) whether they are meeting their requirements. But until recently awareness of these resources and how to use them has been uneven among our students, resulting in widespread confusion and an undergraduate culture of dependency.

To address this, I have harnessed the web and email to create an information environment within which students can count on finding up to date and accurate policies, forms, and facts that they need to make intelligent decisions regarding their progress to degree. Our website aggregates current course offerings and degree requirements. In monthly email bulletins I share news of intellectual and community engagement opportunities and advertise internships and Career Resource Center events. This centralized and tailored information environment invites our most ambitious students into UF’s most exciting opportunities: study abroad, undergraduate research, paid internships etc. Equally if not more important, however, better information creates a more manageable bureaucratic world. This is important for everyone, but especially for students who the many students in Women’s Studies who face academic, financial, and scheduling challenges in their day-to-day lives.

It should be noted that Women’s Studies majors are not “average” UF students. According to the Survey of Student Engagement in the Research University, approximately 40% of our majors self-identify as “working class” or “poor,” compared to 23% in CLAS overall. About 50% of our majors self-identify as African American or Hispanic, compared to 25% in CLAS overall. Our majors are as “smart” as the average UF student, without question. But as numerous studies have demonstrated, students from outside the middle class are more likely to come from under-resourced educational backgrounds and to have heavy ongoing obligations—waged work, dependent care, personal health issues—that they must balance against academic work, which often suffers as a result.

Successful advising, therefore, requires me to know not only how our major works, but also to know the GenEd requirements, so I can plot realistic schedules for students balancing work and family against their remaining credit hours. In addition to knowing what classes we offer, I must know about their content and style so that I can make meaningful suggestions to students who need classes they can succeed in. On top of academic matters, I’ve had to learn the workings of the financial aid office, infirmary, and counseling center, because without bodily, psychic, and financial functionality, students’ academic performance will consistently be sub-par. The result is a holistic advising practice that sometimes takes advantage of the university’s strengths, and other times attempts to compensate for its weaknesses.