A LETTER TO NEW ADVISEES

Fall semester brings more than 1,000 new undergraduate students to CALS. Freshmen and transfer students are well-qualified to be a part of UF, but they can still benefit from a positive relationship with a faculty advisor.

The following article is adapted from The Teaching Professor, April 1997, and was originally written by Michael Mavrovouniotis of Northwestern University.

The purpose of this letter, which I send to new advisees, is to make advising more effective. A letter like this makes the advisor’s approach clear from the beginning, puts students at ease, and assures students that their advisor takes the job seriously. It also asks students to think carefully about their education and career plans.

I invite you to adapt and change it depending on the circumstances of your advising situation. Though addressed to students, the letter is a useful way for advisors to clarify their own thinking about advising. My letter reflects my philosophy; yours may be quite different.

Dear Sandy (I use names, as opposed to generic “dear student” greeting),

Nothing is given so profusely as advice and this university will make sure you are never short of it. I am your new advisor. I hope you will stop by my office at your first opportunity, but let me begin our acquaintance with this letter.

You’ve chosen a major that is not an easy one, and most people’s interests and skills are not well-suited to it. Though I find it exciting and rewarding, it’s not for everyone. Your choice of major is not final. I suggest you continue to evaluate your decision as you begin to take those classes that are required by our majors, and later on when you start taking classes from our department.

Some people find out it’s not what they like after all, and college is definitely the time to make that discovery. We all have to seek carefully the path that will make the best use of our skills and give us a satisfying career. However, changing your major is not something that should be done on a whim. Think about it. When you stop by, I can give you a better idea of what kinds of challenges and opportunities await you.

This and other decisions to come are yours to make. There are requirements to be satisfied for the completion of this major. I hope you’ll find time right away to study them, as well as think about the concentration areas and electives you may want to pursue. The specific decisions along the way, especially the courses you’ll take each semester, are in your hands. I will point out alternatives; I will discuss the likely consequences of each path. I might write down on your class-selection sheet what these consequences are, so they are clear to both of us. But in the end I respect your right to choose your own educational path.

I hope you never face extracurricular obstacles, like problems with family, work, or your social circle. Because I respect your privacy, I will not probe for them, but I am quite willing to listen if you want to tell me. If you do, it may allow me to give you more useful suggestions or refer you to more knowledgeable people. I am always interested in discussing issues you’re facing, academic or extracurricular.
Sometimes you may drop in with a question when I am in the middle of something else (meeting with somebody, writing, or reading something). If I ask you to come back later (and offer to make an appointment), please don’t think that talking to you is less important. It’s just that I have to take one thing at a time, and try to finish it before moving on to the next task. In that spirit, I will make sure that when I am meeting with you, I don’t allow any interruptions.

On occasion I may send you to other people or places to get the information you need— not because I don’t want to take the time, but because I don’t know everything. Instead of misinforming you, I’d rather refer you to people with the right expertise.

I hope you will stop by my office in the next few days. I look forward to meeting you and finding out more about your interests and aspirations.

Your new advisor,

Mike Mavrovouniotis  (I sign each letter. I may add an individual note if I already know something about the student--such as participation in an honors program, double major, or athletic activities.)