

The First-Year Advising Program

Preparing for Summer and Fall Advising Meetings

Dean of the College Office
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What Is Expected of Me as An Advisor?

Williams has two formal academic advising structures. One is “major advising” performed by individual departments, a process that begins once students declare their major field of study in the second semester of their sophomore year. The other is the First-Year Advising Program, a three-semester program that extends through the first semester of a student’s sophomore year. **We thank you for serving as a faculty advisor in the First-Year Advising Program.**

What is expected of you? We hope that you will get to know your advisees and that they will come to consider you an important part of a growing team of faculty and staff who are invested in their success.

Faculty advising is not a solo job. Faculty advisors partner with members of various offices throughout the College: the [Dean’s Office](#), the [Davis Center](#), [Integrative Wellbeing Services](#), [Chaplain’s Office](#), and [Career Exploration](#). Contacts in these areas can be found at the end of this packet, which is a compilation of key information and resources that could be helpful to you as you work with your advisees.

Goals of First-Year Advising

The primary goals for the First-Year Advising Program are for faculty to:

- Serve as a student's primary source for academic advice and planning;
- Help students with the course registration process; and
- Help students identify and use appropriate resources.

Specifically, we hope that you will:

- Provide a structured first contact for each incoming student (first-year and transfer);
- Help students understand the basics of the curriculum, including key academic milestones, graduation requirements, and how to use the College catalog;
- Encourage exploration – we want to help all students to consider their education broadly, take calculated intellectual risks, and view exploration of the curriculum as an opportunity to build on their interests, hopes, and experiences in new ways;
- Encourage self-reflection – we want students to set aside time to think about what they enjoy, what they would like to do, and what they hope to achieve;
- Help students begin the process of charting academic plans;
- Normalize the use of academic and co-curricular resources – office hours, the Writing Workshop, peer tutoring, the Math & Science Resources Center, Accessible Education, and the Deans office;
- Weigh in on what sounds like a reasonable course load and/or co-curricular plans; and
- Remind students about the importance of academic integrity including the Honor Code.

Advising Overview with Dates

Summer Welcome – July 29 to August 5: A week before pre-registration, we ask that you set up virtual meetings with your new advisees to welcome them to Williams.

Pre-registration for Fall – August 5 to 9: It is important to emphasize to incoming students that **pre-registration does not guarantee a seat in the course.** Please let your advisees know that the Registrar's Office will notify them if they have been dropped from courses. Please reassure your advisees that they can replace those courses when registration reopens and during the Drop/Add period.

Fall Registration – August 19 to 26

First Days Meeting – September 4 from 1:30 to 4pm: During *First Days*, you will meet your first-year advisees in person. At this point, they may have been dropped from some courses and need to make new selections, or they may have changed their minds and would like to modify their course schedule. At this time, they will have an opportunity to select a 5th course. We recommend that you and your advisee discuss whether the course load is a balanced and manageable one. You should remind students that they can make changes to their schedule during the drop-add period (September 5-15), and that they should attend the first-class meeting for any course they are considering adding to their schedule.

October check-in with students who receive 'advisories' – The Registrar's Office will reach out to all first-year advisors with advisees who, in the opinion of their professors, are failing to meet academic standards in a course. You should reach out to any advisees who fall into this category to check in and connect them with useful resources (e.g., the Class Dean, academic resources, and Accessible Education).

Spring Pre-registration – The Registrar's Office will remind you of the dates of pre-registration for spring courses, and you will be asked to meet with your advisees again (late Oct/early Nov).

April check-in with students who receive 'advisories' – Once again, the Registrar's Office will reach out to all first-year advisors with advisees who, in the opinion of their professors, are failing to meet academic standards in a course. You should reach out to any advisees who fall into this category to check in and help students connect to support services.

Fall pre-registration - The Registrar's Office will remind you of the dates of pre-registration for the following year's fall courses, and you will be asked to meet with your advisees (in late April/early May).

Spring pre-registration for Sophomores – Your last official meeting with your sophomore advisees will be in advance of spring registration (late Oct/early Nov). After that, sophomores will declare a major and choose an advisor within their department/concentration. While you will have completed your 'official' advising duties, we encourage you to maintain relationships with your advisees throughout their time at Williams.

Initial Summer Meeting – Topics to Discuss

Williams celebrates our small size, and your first meeting allows students to experience the kind of one-on-one interactions that we value *even before students arrive on campus*. What should you talk about?

Encourage exploration and flexibility

You should encourage your advisees to explore the curriculum – Williams offers courses in disciplines that some of our students might not even know exist! You should also encourage your advisees to give themselves permission to be flexible. Some students will not know where they are headed yet, while others will already have their entire semester (or year, or all 4 years) planned out at the get go. You can emphasize that the first two years are the time when students should experiment, try new fields, and expose themselves to a wide range of disciplines. **You can ask the following questions that might encourage exploration:**

- *What have you most enjoyed academically? Are there skills you are most interested in building, and areas where you feel less confident?* Both discussions could allow you to suggest some departments or programs that the student may not know about (*You want to strengthen your writing skills? Great! You could choose an English course, but have you considered Philosophy, Art, History, Comp Lit, or Africana Studies?*).
- *Williams has distribution requirements across math/ sciences, humanities, social sciences. These requirements encourage students to enjoy the breadth of the curriculum. Do you have any thoughts yet about how you might make the most out of these opportunities?* Your framing could invite students to shift their thinking away from ‘requirements’ and toward ‘opportunity’. You can also tell your advisees that our curriculum includes many arts courses for non-arts majors and many science courses for non-science majors. The course description will provide information about the extent to which prior knowledge or prerequisites are required. There are lots of courses that require no prior knowledge/experience.
- *Are you getting any advice on course selection? If so, from whom?* This can help you get a sense of whether there are specific family supports (or pressures) in play, and also whether the student is feeling alone in making decisions about college.

You should tell your advisees that the pass/fail designation is a tool for exploration. Typically, students can choose to designate a total of 3 courses as pass/fail during their time at Williams (provided that the course is listed in the course catalog as eligible for pass/fail). Pass/Fail policies can be found in the [Academic Policies section](#) of the Registrar’s webpage.

Beginning fall 2022 deadlines for pass/fail are as follows:

In the fall semester students have until one week after grades are due to declare which eligible course they are taking pass/fail. In the spring semester, the deadline for graduating seniors is one business day after grades are due to declare which eligible course they are taking pass/fail. All other students, in the spring semester, have until one week after grades are due to declare which eligible course they are taking pass/fail.

Provide your advisees with a framework for selecting courses

You should show your advisees how to use the course catalog as they build their fall schedule. As they read the course offerings, students should also be encouraged to do the following:

- **Consider specific long-term career goals.** We have dedicated advisors for certain fields, and you can encourage students to be in touch with these advisors for more detailed information about course planning:

- o [Engineering](#) – Prof. Kate Jensen, kej2@williams.edu
- o [Health professions](#) – Sharon Gonzales, sdg5@williams.edu
- o [Law](#) – Alexa Icenia, ai7@williams.edu
- o [K-12 Education](#) – Prof. Susan Engel, sengel@williams.edu
- **Think about balancing the course load in terms of**
 - o Disciplines (try to sample broadly across the 3 academic divisions; and alert students about the **early concentration rule** – first-year students can't take more than one course with the same prefix and no more than two in the same department in a semester);
 - o Assignments (choose courses that mix up expectations for finals, papers, heavy readings, labs, or additional meeting times);
 - o Size (take at least one small course each semester if possible).
- **Think about the spring semester too.** There are some classes offered during the fall and not the spring, and vice versa; students should take note of this. In addition, they should make sure that they are taking prerequisite courses for classes they already know they intend to take in the spring.
- **Explore half-credit courses.** Williams offers some half-credit courses in dance, music, and theater. **These half-credit courses do not count toward the total number of courses required for graduation, and cannot be used to fulfill distributional requirements.** Half-credit courses in the dance and theater department are always designated as pass-fail. Half-credit courses in the music department may be taken on a graded or on a pass-fail basis.
- **Take extra-curricular activities into account.** Will there be particularly busy times of the year (e.g., athletic training, theater/dance/art productions, etc.)? How will this fit into the schedule and course requirements?

A special word about pre-med requirements

Some of your advisees may indicate that they are “pre-med” and would like to go to medical school after Williams. While the requirements are numerous, the good news is that with proper planning, students can fulfill pre-medical/pre-health requirements while still pursuing other interests (e.g., majoring in a non-science discipline; double majoring or adding a concentration; studying abroad; and completing a thesis). **Students interested in pre-med requirements should visit the Center for Career Exploration website [here](#) and consult with the Science & Health Professions Advisor before choosing courses.** A few facts for students interested in pre-health include:

- AP courses may "count" toward pre-med course requirements. Most commonly, students can use AP Calculus I and II courses for the math requirement, and AP Physics is generally used for one semester of Physics. See the Science and Health Professions Advisor for specifics.
- To study away in junior year, it is best to have started the four-course chemistry sequence (CHEM 153, CHEM 156) in the first year.
- Students should select one or two laboratory science courses during both semesters of the first-year semesters. Typically, pre-health students enroll in BIOL 101 and CHEM 153 in the first semester of first-year, but this is not mandatory and may not be the best fit. Again, your advisee can check with the Science and Health Professions Advisor.

First Days – Topics to Discuss

Prior to your meeting with advisees during First Days, you will receive an email about your advisees' pre-registration selections as well as the placement results from any assessments they may have taken over the summer and during orientation. We will host a meeting for all faculty advisors immediately prior to your individual advising sessions with more information about how to interpret the placement data you will receive. During your in-person meeting with your advisees, we recommend that you do the following:

Review course selections and placement results

You should review placement results with your advisees and make sure that their course selections match the placement advice provided. Now is the time to ask if they are considering making any further changes to their course schedule and to answer any questions they might have.

Encourage students to make connections with faculty right from the start

At Williams, students enjoy a student-to-faculty ratio of 7:1, and we pride ourselves on providing students with the opportunity to construct a deeply immersive and personal education that centers relationships at its core. Now – right at the beginning of your advisees' first semester at Williams – is a great time for your advisees to begin forging relationships with their instructors. Spend some time discussing strategies for how they should do that:

- Introducing yourself before or after class
- Visiting office hours
- Discussing career plans/ambitions
- Asking faculty if they can participate in their research (or what skills they would need in order to be able to do so in the future)

Encourage your advisee to develop an advising team

While faculty advisors are an excellent resource, we hope that students will gradually build a larger network of advisors during the time at Williams. Encourage your advisees to think about building a team – who else could be a helpful addition? Students could consider an athletic coach, a librarian, a member of the Davis Center, a Chaplain, a tutor, just to name a few. The chart to the right provides examples that might be useful.

Building an Advising Team		
Academic Resources	Nurturing interests	Student support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Department/Prog▪ Writing Workshop▪ Quantitative Skills & Peer Support▪ Accessible Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Center for Learning in Action▪ '68 Center for Career Exploration▪ Davis Center▪ Fellowship Office▪ Study Away▪ Athletics▪ Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Dean's Office▪ Davis Center▪ Student Health & Wellness▪ Chaplain's Office▪ Office of IDEI▪ Office of Student Life

Help your advisee navigate resources and normalize their use

One of the biggest misconceptions that new students carry to Williams is the assumption that using support systems indicates weakness or failure. Indeed, many of our students will have arrived at Williams without ever seeking extra resources or guidance during their high school years. At Williams, however, our resources are designed for *everyone*. When we ask graduating seniors about the things they wish they knew as a first-year student, they repeatedly tell us that they wish they knew from the start that using these resources is what strong students do to stay on track. Don't assume students know where to go or how to ask for help. Point out resources, offer to help with introductions, or help them draft an initial email if they are feeling unsure.

Explain the importance of the Honor Code

As an institution fundamentally concerned with the free exchange of ideas, Williams College has always depended on the academic integrity of each of its members. All students who enroll at the College agree to respect and acknowledge the research and ideas of others in their work and to abide by instructor's requirements governing assignments and exams. Students who break these regulations, misrepresent their own work, or collaborate in the misrepresentation of another's work have committed a serious violation of this agreement.

Encourage your advisees to ask questions about how the honor code applies to any of their courses if they are unsure. Faculty are happy to answer questions about citation, appropriate collaboration, appropriate use of materials, and more. It is far better to ask for clarification than to inadvertently violate the honor code. Further, students should always opt to ask for an extension or agree to accept a penalty for late work rather than violating the honor code in order to turn in an assignment on time.

Summary of Academic Requirements at Williams

We do not expect you to be experts on all the academic policies and requirements. Actually, we hope that you show your advisees how to find essential information in the catalog and/or [registrar's website](#). Here is a summary of the graduation and academic requirements for your review.

- **Number of academic courses needed to graduate:** Incoming students need to complete 32 courses in order to earn their Williams degree (4 courses per semester over the course of 8 semesters).
- **Number of Winter Study courses needed to graduate.** Students participate in a Williams Study (WS) course every January and must complete 4 WS courses in order to graduate.
- **Completion of a Major.** All students must complete the requirements for one major with an average grade of C- for all courses taken within the major.
- **Divisional Requirements.** All students are required to complete a total of 3 courses within each division (1=Language/Arts; 2= Social Sciences; 3= Science/Math) by the time they graduate. Students need to complete 2 courses in each division by the end of their sophomore year.
- **Writing Skills requirement.** All students must pass at least 2 graded courses, which are designated in the course catalog as 'writing skills' courses. One of these courses must be completed by the end of the sophomore year, and the other must be completed by the end of the junior year. It is a good idea to recommend that advisees consider taking their first Writing Skills course during the first-year for two reasons (1) honing writing skills will be useful to them in all future courses, and (2) a number of writing skills courses are geared toward first-year students and give preference to them in the pre-registration process.
- **Quantitative/Formal Reasoning Requirement.** All students must pass at least 1 graded course primarily concerned with quantitative or formal reasoning (designated as 'Q' in the course catalog) by the end of the junior year. All incoming students take a self-administered assessment of quantitative reasoning over the summer. Results of that assessment may direct students' choice about which type of Q course to take.
- **Difference, Power and Equity requirement.** The DPE requirement provides students with the opportunity to analyze the shaping of social differences, dynamics of unequal power, and processes of change. All students are required to complete 1 such course during their time at Williams. This course may be completed any semester before graduation, but students are urged to do it by the end of their sophomore year.
- **Physical education requirement.** All students must complete 4 PE activities by the end of the sophomore year. Students can learn more about PE options by visiting the Department of Athletics webpage.
- **Taking an extra course.** Typically, a standard/full load is considered to be 4 courses per semester. Students can choose to sign up for an extra course if they wish. While most students will be able to handle 4 courses in their first semester, taking more than that will likely be difficult. Students should be advised against taking a 5th course until they have experienced at least one semester of Williams courses. **Fifth courses do not contribute to degree requirements** (i.e., cannot be used to accelerate graduation), but can be used to meet requirements and prerequisites, and are included in the calculation of GPA.

Advising Partners & Contact Information

We close this packet the way that we started it, by thanking you for serving as a faculty advisor.

Again, what is expected of you? We hope that you will get to know your advisees, and that they will come to consider you an important part of a growing team of faculty and staff members who are invested in their success. **You are not expected to become deeply involved in your advisees' personal struggles.** We do ask you to be alert for any signs that an advisee might be encountering some kind of trouble and contact (or encourage them to contact) people who can provide assistance.

Here are key people and areas along with their contact information:

Deans

- Gretchen Long, Dean of the College, glong@williams.edu
- Christina Walsh, Dean of First Year Students, cfw2@williams.edu
- Tamanika Steward, Director of Transfer and Non-traditional Student Services, tts1@williams.edu
- Ninah Pretto, Director of International Student Services, ntp1@williams.edu
- Rachel Bukanc, Senior Associate Dean of Students, rvb1@williams.edu

Offices

- [Quantitative Skills Programs](#)
Nick Hanford, Director, nh8@williams.edu
- [The Writing Center](#)
Julia Munemo, Director, jmm3@williams.edu
- [Accessible Education](#)
Katy Evans, Interim Director, ke5@williams.edu
- [Engineering](#) – Prof. Kate Jensen, kej2@williams.edu
- [Health professions](#) – Sharon Gonzales, sdg5@williams.edu
- [Law](#) – Alexa Icenia, ai7@williams.edu
- [K-12 Education](#) – Prof. Susan Engel, sengel@williams.edu
- ['68 Center for Career Exploration](#), wcc@williams.edu
- [Davis Center \(formerly Multicultural Center\)](#), daviscenter@williams.edu
- [Office of Campus Life](#)
- [Chaplains' Office](#)
- [Health & Wellness Services](#)
- [Integrative Wellbeing \(Counseling\) Services](#)
- [Title IX](#)
- Financial Aid finaid@williams.edu
- Office of Student Accounts sfs@williams.edu