

A Handbook for First-Year Advisors

An electronic version of this handbook, complete with links, is available at
<http://academics.umw.edu/qep/advising-guide/>.

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This short handbook is intended to provide a quick overview of the important nuts-n-bolts policy and curriculum matters that are relevant to anyone offering academic advising for a new first-year student at the University of Mary Washington.

In no way is this document intended to be complete or comprehensive. Think of this handbook as the highlights of several key documents that include: the Undergraduate Academic Catalog, the Faculty Handbook, the Directory of Academic Procedures, and a variety of webpages of key offices including Academic and Career Services, the Registrar, and the Office of the Provost.

When in doubt about policy matters, we strongly encourage you to contact the Office of Academic Services (x1010) on the second floor of Lee Hall for clarification. That office, including its director and the team of professional advisors, has a wealth of knowledge about our programs and policies. They are a valuable resource and can help connect you to other offices as needed.

In this handbook you will find an overview of important information organized as follows:

Part 1: The Role of the First-Year Advisor

Part 2: The Undergraduate Degree

Part 3: The General Education Curriculum

Part 4: Important Deadlines and Scheduling Details

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Part 1: The Role of the First-Year Advisor

Faculty academic advising is a cornerstone of the UMW experience, and first-year advising is now embedded within the First-Year Seminar. This creates multiple weekly contact points between freshmen and their advisor during the crucial first weeks and months of college. The daily interactions of the seminar, bolstered by the weekly announcements from the Director of the First-Year Seminar Program, provide a structured and seamless experience for UMW undergraduates. While the First-Year Seminar instructor is the primary contact and the advisor of record for the majority of first-year students (a few exceptions exist, such as for those participating in the Student Transition Program), they are not alone in guiding first-year students. All residential first-year students are assigned a professional advisor in the Office of Academic Services, a peer mentor, and a residential advisor (commuter students are connected to Commuter Student Services). As the faculty advisor, your role involves the following:

- **Fall Semester weekly contact**: Every class period is an opportunity for advising. This need not involve much class time because even a few minutes at the beginning or end of class dedicated to reinforcing key messages, highlighting important dates, or answering questions is a way to deliver quality advising. The weekly email from the Director of the First-Year Seminar Program is designed to support this task.
- **Fall and Spring registration appointments**: The most significant investment of outside-of-class time involves an advising appointment prior to fall and spring course registration. During this meeting, your responsibility is to review the student's proposed schedule, discuss their progress to date, and address any challenges or roadblocks to success.
- **Coordinate class visits and tutorials**: Professional advisors in the Office of Academic Services are assigned to each course and are prepared to make class visits in support of advising and registration. Faculty advisors are responsible for scheduling these appointments with their assigned professional advisor.
- **Referrals and Alerts**: As the fall semester FSEM instructor and advisor, you have significant contact with our first-year students. Such visibility creates opportunities for referrals and alerts to invite other units and offices from across the institution to participate in coordinating success and addressing issues of concern. The first-year support network (FSEM instructor, professional advisor in Academic Services, peer mentor, and residential advisor) is one such resource. In addition, the Office of Academic Services and the Dean of Student Life stand ready to assist you, and your responsibility is to make such a referral.

- **Probation appointments:** First-year advisors should schedule a probation appointment with students who are on probation at the end of their first semester. This meeting should occur during the first week of spring classes and would involve discussing spring schedule adjustments, discussing the challenges and roadblocks of the first semester, and identifying a plan to bolster the GPA. Faculty are supported in this effort by the Office of Academic Services, which provides and facilitates a number of programs and opportunities targeted to assist students on probation. *Faculty will receive notice of unsatisfactory academic standing (probation or suspension) for their advisees from the Office of the Registrar approximately 48 hours after grades are due.*
- **Sophomore transition:** During the spring registration advising appointment (in the two weeks following Spring Break) you should discuss the student's academic plans, determine their readiness to declare their major, and make a decision about who is best positioned to serve as their pre-major advisor until they are ready to declare. Students who are ready to declare should be encouraged to do so before the end of April. As the first-year advisor, you may choose to retain all, some, or none of your first-year advisees who are not yet prepared to declare. Those who are not retained by you will be assigned a professional advisor in the Office of Academic Services.

Part 2: The Undergraduate Degree

Requirements for a Bachelor's Degree

Every student must have the following three basic components totaling 120 credits in order to earn a Bachelor's degree: completion of the **General Education** requirements, a **Major**, and **Electives**. In addition to completing these requirements and at least 120 credits, students must have both an overall GPA and a major GPA of at least a 2.0.

Limitations

There are limitations on what can count toward the required 120 credits. These include:

- a 60-credit limit in any one discipline, and
- limits on number of PE or Pass/Fail credits, etc.

See the Undergraduate Academic Catalog for a complete list of limitations.

Double Majors

Increasingly, students are asking about double majors. This is certainly an option and requires careful planning in order to complete all of the requirements for the two majors within (what we hope will be) four years. Students can have at most a 9-credit overlap between two majors. As an advisor, you should have the conversation about whether a second major is sufficiently connected to their post-graduation plans or interests that it is worth the trade-off involved (i.e., losing elective credits that give them great flexibility in selecting individual courses to round out their academic portfolio).

Accessorizing your degree

Many students will use their electives to complement their major program. Here's what's common:

Minors & Certificates

Many minors are available to UMW students. Generally speaking, a minor is about *half* a major (15 – 28 credits with at least three courses at the 300- and 400-level). Students can have at most a 2-course overlap between a major and a minor. There is one certificate program that may be of interest to new first-years as well: Geographic Information Systems (18 credits).

Teaching Licensure

Requirements for licensure are set by the state, not by academic departments (i.e., you cannot “major in education” in the Commonwealth of Virginia). Students interested in teaching in VA must major in a discipline and then complete an endorsement for state licensure. State licensure pathways amount to 5-year programs that end with a master's degree. Students interested in pursuing licensure need to apply for entrance to the education program, and there are requirements for admission (e.g., GPA requirements, number of credits already completed, etc.). Direct interested students to the College of Education for the most current information regarding entrance requirements and procedures.

1. Those interested in elementary education can major in any discipline they want and graduate with a bachelor's degree in that discipline, followed by a Master of Science in Elementary Education.
2. For secondary licensure (grades 6 – 12), students major in one of the endorsement areas (one of the sciences, math, history, or English), graduate with a bachelor's degree in that discipline, and then a Master of Education.

3. There is also an M.Ed. program in PreK – 12 with endorsement areas of art, languages, music, and theatre, and an M.Ed. program in special education.
4. *Teaching without licensure*. There are many opportunities for teaching in private schools where state licensure is not a requirement. Typically, a bachelor's degree in the desired discipline is sufficient. This option might be worth noting to students who seem interested in teaching but not willing to pursue the state licensure requirements.

Part 3: The General Education Curriculum

Completion of the UMW General Education Curriculum is required for all students. Many students will come to us with AP, IB, dual enrollment, or other “transfer” credit. Often, these credits come in as equivalent to UMW courses and may satisfy general education requirements. Others will be awarded as non-major credit. Here's a summary of the Gen Ed areas.

The Gen Ed Curriculum

- There are 8 Core Areas: **First-Year Seminar**, **Quantitative Reasoning** (2 courses), **Natural Science** (one 2-course sequence, at least one lab course), **Global Inquiry** (1 course or experience), **Language** (intermediate competency), **Arts, Literature, and Performance** (1 Process, 1 Appreciation), **Human Experience and Society** (2 courses from 2 different disciplines, at least one course in a social science discipline)
- **Experiential Learning** – This is an *outside-the-classroom* experience that is frequently satisfied with Internships (499), Directed Study (491), URES 197, study abroad, practicum, or performance groups. Students generally do not meet this requirement as freshmen. It's worth mentioning to them, but not something for them to stress over as first-year students.
- There are two “**Across the Curriculum**” requirements:
 - **Writing Intensive** – Every student is required to complete 4 WI courses.
 - **Speaking Intensive** – Every student is required to complete 2 SI courses.

Important Policies

- **Double dipping within Gen Ed requirements:** The same course cannot be used to satisfy two separate General Education core areas. However, a course can be used to satisfy a core area and also a WI and/or SI requirement.
- **Double dipping between Gen Ed and major/minor requirements:** A course can be used to satisfy a General Education requirement and a major or minor requirement. For example, it is certainly possible to have a course that satisfies QR, a major requirement, and is Writing Intensive.

- **Courses without standard grades:** Generally speaking, you cannot take an “ungraded” course (e.g., pass/fail) and have it count for a General Education requirement or a major/minor requirement. The only real exceptions are with Global Inquiry, where an approved Study Abroad experience can satisfy the requirement, and Experiential Learning, where students have several ungraded options (e.g., study abroad, summer research experiences, and some internships – like Geography’s – that may only be taken pass/fail).
- **Exceptions/Reevaluation of transfer credit must be approved by the faculty General Education Committee:** It’s important to note that exceptions to the General Education requirements are rare. However, there may be times that students believe that transfer credit should be reevaluated as satisfying a UMW requirement. The Office of the Registrar evaluates credit for transfer and imposes a strict test. On such occasions, students may provide a rationale and additional documentation, which upon further review by the General Education Committee, students may be awarded a UMW equivalency for the course. The process for making a request for an exception to a general education requirement always starts with a visit—*by the student*—to the Registrar’s window on the second floor of Lee Hall.

Part 4: Important Deadlines and Scheduling Details

Adding and Dropping Courses. Students can **add** courses through the first week of the semester and **drop** courses through the first 3 weeks of class. Once week 3 passes, the only option is to withdraw (W). Dropped courses disappear from a student’s record. Courses from which the student withdraws stay on the transcript with a grade of W.

Registration Advising. Course schedules are typically made available in Banner around week 6 or 7 of the semester. After fall or spring break, students are expected to meet with their academic advisor to discuss the course schedule for the next semester—this two-week period prior to registration is on the academic calendar. After the advising meeting, the advisor clears the advising hold in Banner, thereby allowing the student to access the Banner registration tools during their registration appointment time. Faculty should never remove advising holds before having a conversation with their advisee.

Withdrawing and Switching to Pass/Fail. Students have through the 9th week of the semester to switch a class to pass/fail or to withdraw from an individual course.

- *Meaning of a W.* When students withdraw from a course, they still pay for the course and it appears on their transcript as a W. It does not affect their GPA.
- *Consequences and restrictions of Pass/Fail.* As a general rule, courses taken P/F cannot be used to satisfy major/minor/Gen Ed requirements. A Pass contributes nothing toward the student’s GPA; however, a Fail counts as an F in the GPA computation.

Mid-semester Reporting. Around week 7, faculty will be asked to report students who have either unsatisfactory performance (U) or have not attended class (N). It is very important for faculty to verify their rolls mid-semester! It prevents problems at the end of the semester with students who thought they dropped/withdrew but didn't. In fact, it is actually preferable to verify course rolls long before mid-semester. Every semester, there are faculty who report that they had a student in their class all semester and "just now noticed" that they are not on the roll. Help your students and the Registrar's Office: be sure that the students who are on your roll are actually in your class, and then tell the student and the Registrar immediately if you have a student who's coming to class but is not on your roll.

Incompletes. When students are unable to complete the semester due to extenuating circumstances, they can request an Incomplete (I) from their professor. Student requests and the faculty response must be made in writing. The student and the faculty member agree on a date when the incomplete work is to be submitted (this is usually sometime within the first 4 weeks of the subsequent semester). Incomplete grades must be removed by the end of the subsequent semester (otherwise, a grade of "F" is recorded). Students who are in military service (active duty, reserves, or National Guard) may request an Incomplete grade for military deployment, mobilizations, or duty changes occurring in the final 3 weeks of the course. A copy of the military orders must be provided to the Office of the Registrar as documentation. The deadline for removing an Incomplete given on the basis of military service is the last day of the semester following the one in which the Incomplete was given.

Withdrawing from the University. A student is permitted to withdraw from the university (all courses) up until the last day of classes. This may even be advisable in extreme circumstances where successful completion of their course work is in jeopardy. Withdrawing from the university gives a student a grade of W in every course, so this decision should be made in consultation with the academic advisor and the Office of Academic Services. Students should understand that full-time status (12 credit hours) is an important requirement for insurance and financial aid (Satisfactory Academic Progress), GI Bill eligibility, athletic and co-curricular participation, on-campus housing, etc.

Students are responsible for understanding the consequences of actions they take regarding their academic schedules. It is important to contact the appropriate offices if there is any question about the consequences of major changes to course schedules.

Part 5: Student Self-Help Checklist

Students are responsible for their own academic records. They should be encouraged to look at their transcripts regularly to be certain that everything is accurate.

Scheduling Time with Your Advisor. Students should feel free to schedule an advising session any time during the semester. In particular, students should schedule a course registration advising session (as described above) once the next semester's course schedule is posted, but well in advance of their registration appointment time. After that meeting, advisors can remove the student's registration hold in Banner, thereby clearing the student to register.

Registration Appointment Times. Students are assigned a time to register based on the number of **earned** credits they have at the time of registration. Some groups get priority registration (students in the Honors Program, students receiving such accommodations from the Office of Disability Resources, and veterans). Seniors register next, followed by juniors, etc. First-year students will register last, which can create some frustration for them. For their first semester, first-years are partially registered by staff in Academic Services prior to their arrival at Summer Orientation, and then they complete their schedule at Orientation. In many departments, chairs hold seats for first-year students to assist them in creating their first-semester schedule. Beginning with fall 2014 registration, UMW extended priority registration to all active duty members, veterans, reservists, and Virginia National Guard members. Additional details are available online.

Using Banner Registration. The Banner Registration System is a straight-forward system that allows students to look up courses, add them, and remove them from their schedule. A short video from June orientation, available online, demonstrates how to use the system.

Degree Evaluation and What-If Analysis. Every student should be taught how to run their own degree audit and/or "What-If Analysis." This will allow them to track their progress toward graduation.

Academic Records. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) states, in essence, that academic records may be maintained by the University and are accessible only by employees acting in an official capacity or by permission of the student. In particular, parents are not permitted to access such records without consent of the student. The Registrar's Office has a process whereby students may "delegate access" to other individuals for certain information such as grades and financial information. In addition, a student who wishes to grant access to another individual to have a conversation about their academic performance must complete a "release of information" (ROI) form available from Academic Services. In such cases, the release is kept on file. As an advisor, you are under no obligation to have such a conversation when parents or families make inquiries about a student's performance. Should

you elect to do so, you must consult the ROI list (call x1010) before discussing any matters protected under federal law.

Probation and Suspension. Students whose GPA falls below certain thresholds are subject to Probation (essentially a warning) and Suspension. The threshold is dependent upon the number of credits completed, but ranges between 1.6 and 2.0. For further details, consult the Undergraduate Academic Catalog. Students who have been suspended have the option of appealing to the faculty Committee on Academic Standing.

Financial Aid. Many students will approach you with questions about financial aid. As many of these issues are subject to federal laws, it is best to refer students to the Office of Financial Aid in Lee Hall, rather than to try to answer questions that you may not be qualified to answer.

Part 6: Frequently Confused Matters

Prerequisites. Many courses, especially in linear-building subjects, have prerequisites and/or co-requisites in the form of other courses. Sometimes courses are set as needing “Permission of Instructor” to enter the course.

- *Getting approvals.* As a general rule, taking a course out of sequence or waiving prerequisites requires approval by the faculty member teaching the course and his or her department chair. Students should start the process by talking either to the faculty member teaching the course they wish to enter or to the department chair.
- *POI:* If a course is set POI (permission of instructor), the student should contact the faculty member teaching the course to determine eligibility requirements for entering the class.
- *Placement testing.* Some departments (Mathematics, Chemistry, Modern Languages and Literatures) have testing that helps place students into the most appropriate course for beginning their studies. Details vary by discipline. Students should generally contact the department chair if they have questions about placement testing.

Retaking courses. Students might earn poor grades in some courses, and one very practical option for them to consider is repeating the course. UMW policy states that students can only repeat courses in which they have earned a grade of C- or below, and a course may be repeated only one time. After taking a course twice, they cannot repeat the course at UMW, and only the most recent grade contributes to the GPA.

There is one wrinkle in this policy which began in fall 2015: students who do not complete the FSEM course in which they were registered during their first semester after matriculation must complete it during their second semester of enrollment. These students are eligible to replace

their failing grade by enrolling in *any* other FSEM 100 course. HIST 201/202 is not considered equivalent to FSEM 100 for this repeat and replacement provision.

Transferring courses. Students will inquire about taking courses at another institution and transferring the credits to UMW to assist in completing their UMW degree requirements. This happens frequently in the summer.

- *UMW credit.* As a general rule for UMW students, UMW credit trumps all others. Students cannot retake a course at another institution (that they already completed here) in an attempt to transfer it back to UMW to replace a lower grade. If a student received AP, IB, dual enrollment, or any other “examination” credit for a UMW course, and then later takes the UMW course, the prior credit is forfeited.
- *Preapproval.* As a general rule, students are required to obtain “pre-approval” for a course to transfer to UMW and should do so through the Office of the Registrar *prior* to enrolling in the course. In particular, the Registrar maintains a website that lists Virginia Community College System (VCCS) courses that have been determined as equivalent to UMW courses. Consideration of courses beyond those that have been evaluated for equivalency must come from the department chair. Requests for evaluation of transfer credit originate with an online form from the Registrar's Office.

Study Abroad

- *Faculty-led vs. Non-faculty-led.* Students start asking questions about study abroad early. There are two main types of study abroad, and both are coordinated through the Center for International Education (CIE). The Faculty-led experiences are trips where a UMW faculty member accompanies a group of students to another country for study, often in the summer or over spring break. There are many options available to our students and you can find a comprehensive list on the CIE website. Non-faculty-led experiences amount to students traveling to another university for an entire semester or year to enroll in classes at that university. CIE is your primary resource for learning about opportunities in both of these areas.
- *Meeting GenEd requirements with study abroad (GI/EL).* If approved in advance, study abroad experience can potentially satisfy either the Global Inquiry or the Experiential Learning requirement of our General Education Curriculum. The same study abroad experience may not be used to meet both Global Inquiry and Experiential Learning. In order to use a study abroad experience to meet a General Education requirement, students must complete a form identifying a faculty member who will monitor a “reflective component” of the experience (often, this is a short reflective paper about the experience). Students who opt for this approach enroll in SAGE 000 prior to departing on the study abroad experience. After the trip, and during the semester following the experience, the student completes the “reflective” component as described on the SAGE 000. They are expected to meet with the faculty advisor to reflect on their experience, and the faculty member assigns a Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory grade to the non-credit-bearing course. Also note that some programs,

such as Spanish, have a separate study abroad reflection course that does earn credit (GERM 301 and SPAN 301, Study Abroad Reflection, both 1 credit).

- *Restrictions.* It should be noted that students must have completed 12 UMW credits and earned a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 to be eligible for UMW Study Abroad. Students on academic probation are ineligible to study abroad. Transfer students must be in residence at UMW for one semester before studying abroad. Students who are on a first suspension at the time of departure may depart on a study abroad course only after being advised by the Office of Academic Services.

Part 7: Major Decisions

Selecting a Major. While many students come to UMW knowing what they want for their major, many others come in undecided. Too often, these undecided students float through their first few semesters and consequently delay their degree completion. We can assist these students in many ways. First and foremost, we can share our stories about how we came to our own major decisions. We can also encourage students to conduct “informational interviews” with others on campus. In addition, several programmatic opportunities are available to support these undecided students. First, beginning in Fall 2016, we are offering IDIS 191—Liberal Arts and the World of Work. This one-credit course is designed to help undecided students find the place where their talents and passions meet. In addition, the Center for Career and Professional Development (CCPD) has a number of programs and resources, including several self-assessment tools, and advisors should encourage contact with the center staff. Also new this fall is a “Roadmap Program” designed to help students develop an academic and career plan, which involves five structured meetings with a career coach.

Changing a Major. Unsurprisingly, many students come to UMW compelled—by self or others—to pursue particular majors and career paths. These well-laid plans may flounder in the classroom as students complete their coursework and find other interests. As faculty advisors, we are well-positioned to help redirect their efforts and decide if a major change is the best decision for the student. A single meeting to talk about academic and career plans with faculty member can have an enormously beneficial impact on students, especially those considering changing majors. Professional staff in the Office of Academic Services and in the Center for Career and Professional Development are additional assets for students and faculty, and faculty advisors are encouraged to reach out to our professional staff for support and assistance.

Declaring a Major. A first-time, first-year B.A./B.S. student is eligible to declare a major by submitting the Major/Minor Declaration Form to the chairperson of the chosen department at the end of their first year *or* upon completion of 28 credits. Students can find the form on the Registrar’s Office website or by visiting their window on the 2nd floor of Lee Hall.