

Academic advising essential to meet educational goals

By Ted Fuller

Of the Emerald

Greeted by bulletin boards filled with flyers and bookshelves crammed with pamphlets and booklets, students can't help but feel they've found the place with an answer for every question when they walk into the Office of Academic Advising and Student Services in 164 Oregon Hall.

With a staff of 35 counselors, graduate fellows, paraprofessionals and peer advisers, the office is ready to tackle any problems new or returning students might face.

Open for appointments and drop-in visits Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., the office advertises it can help students decipher general University requirements, select a major, file scholastic review petitions, or even contact students in case of emergency.

The office's main goal is to help students complete their University education. "That's what it's all about," said Joe Wade, director of Academic Advising and Student Services.

"Much of what we do is focused on retaining students in the University," Wade said. "In the process we help them clarify their academic interests."

To this end, Wade said the office will coordinate 15 freshman interest groups (FIGS) made up of 20 to 25 first-year students. The groups are set up on the basis of academic and major interests, with students in each group taking at least three selected courses together during fall term.

Wade said FIGS serve two purposes in that they help freshmen select interesting courses that fulfill requirements and help the students make friends during their first term at the University.

"FIGS are for students who want to study in a community type situation," Wade said. Besides taking classes together, students are invited to workshops to improve their study habits and are encouraged to study and socialize together.

Jack Bennett, who coordinates the FIGS program, said most of the groups filled up during the Early Orientation programs in late July. That's part of the reason he wants to increase the number of groups in the future.

"FIGS work very nicely as a model in freshman education," Bennett said. The University of Washington and Eastern Washington University are in the process of starting similar programs based on the Oregon model, he said.

In its fifth year, the program offers 15 study groups that focus on topics ranging from pre-health sciences and prelaw to business, journalism and general liberal arts studies.

The program started in 1982 as an experiment with students who had not declared majors, and Bennett is hoping to have 30 to 50 FIGS during fall term of 1988. He also hopes to add a one-credit seminar course to the program that would introduce students to the University and include workshops on study techniques and using resources available at the University.

"The syllabus is written for the seminar," Bennett said. "All we need is the funding."

Bennett said the FIGS help keep students enrolled in the University. "There's a signifi-

cant improvement in retention" of students who participate in FIGS, he said. He added freshmen who join FIGS are usually more anxious about coming to the University and are worried about how they'll fit in.

Students involved in FIGS take at least one small class together so they can get to know each other, Bennett said. In addition, the groups meet every two weeks for study sessions and workshops.

The small classes are usually writing courses, Bennett said, and offer an additional advantage to the program. He said some freshman composition teachers get together with teachers in the large lecture-hall classes and make writing assignments that tie-in with the other classes an interest group is enrolled in.

While the Office of Academic Advising is interested in helping freshmen make a strong start at the University, Wade also had advice for returning students. "It's very important for students to take advantage of advising," Wade said. He encouraged returning students to pick up individual progress reports and unofficial transcripts from their major departments and make advising appointments with their faculty advisers.

Students who haven't declared a major can go to the Office of Academic Advising for help. Some 35 faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences are also available to help undeclared students.

Wade said help is also available from the 21 departments and schools on campus that offer peer advising, with specially trained students available to answer questions about specific courses and requirements within the department as well as general University requirements.

Despite all the help available, Wade said it's still up to students to take charge of their education. "Students are basically responsible for the requirements as they existed upon their entrance to the University," he said. Consulting with advisers to go over progress reports and course plans is a good way to stay on the right track, he said.



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