
USING CASE STUDIES

Case studies may be the single most powerful and versatile tool in a trainer's or administrator's toolbox. For that reason, we include the sample case studies from the University of Houston, University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the University of Iowa.

What are Case Studies?

Think of case studies as experiential learning. Case studies place the conceptual, informational, and relational components of academic advising within the context of an advising conference. They provide the facts and narrative background on a specific student and ask advisors to advise the student. They allow new advisors to synthesize and apply the knowledge they have gained.

How to Create Case Studies

As experiential exams, case study content and format will vary according to the conceptual, informational, and relational knowledge trainers wish to target. They may provide basic information (see University of Alaska Fairbanks) or offer a full situational narrative for a student (see the University of Iowa). Case studies can be hypothetical or based on the experiences of real students. When first creating case studies, trainers may find that using real-life student cases is the easiest approach. The following suggestions will help the trainer select and develop a case study:

- Determine the informational, conceptual, and relational knowledge to target.
- Ask current advisors to identify students and advising situations that address the targeted issues. For example, the trainer can ask advisors to provide a case with specific parameters: "I need a case study on an entering pre-med major who is an unrealistic candidate for medicine and with whom you have worked on developing alternative majors or careers." Or "I would like a case about a student for whom correct

math placement was difficult to discern."

- Eliminate data that would identify a student (university IDs or social security numbers).
- Write up the student case, omitting references to the advisor's final recommendations, suggestions, or course schedule options.
- Develop a list of questions for new advisors to address. Ask advisors to identify all of the salient issues in the case and to describe specifically how they would approach the conference (what they would say, recommend, ask, etc.) (see University of Houston).

How to Use Case Studies

Case studies can be used during initial and ongoing training to help advisors synthesize the conceptual, informational, and relational components of advising. They also can be used to chart advisor growth, evaluate advisors, and provide professional development for experienced advisors. Some suggestions include the following:

- During initial training, begin with relatively simple case studies in which new advisors focus on applying knowledge of institutional information and using their advising resources (see University of Houston Case Study No. 1).
- Gradually build complexity into case studies to reflect the complex academic and personal situations presented to academic advisors (see University of Iowa).
- Ask new advisors to provide written answers to questions about the case studies and review the case individually or with a training group. Review with a training group will generate more questions and discussion. Subsequently, ask experienced advisors to work through and discuss the case studies in front of the new advisor-training group.
- Review a case study first for informational issues (the salient facts) and then for rela-

tional issues (advisor expressions in response to the facts). The University of Houston “Case Study Review Questions” offers a standard format for approaching case studies.

- Use case studies to chart growth. First use a case study early in training, and then use the same case study 2 and 6 months later to determine how much standard information new advisors have been able to internalize (i.e., reference without additional resources) and how relational skills (e.g., probing questions, facility in delicate advising areas) have developed.
- Ask new advisors to chart their own growth by revisiting earlier case studies and reflecting on the differences in their approaches to the problem.
- Use case studies in evaluation. While it may not be possible for them to observe the conferences of every advisor, advising administrators should be able to work through a case study with advisors to gain insight into the advisor’s knowledge and approaches.
- Keep a file of case studies used as well as potential case studies.
- Use case studies in advisor development programs. Set aside time at an advisor meeting to discuss difficult student cases. The topics can be focused on a particular topic (e.g., working with students with mental disabilities, students seeking unrealistic majors, etc.) or on multiple topics. Even the most experienced advisor gains new insights into advising via group discussions of case studies.

The sample case studies provide a starting place for trainers who can use them verbatim, adapt them to fit their own institution, or keep as prototypes to use in creating unique case studies. The advisors are encouraged to enjoy working through them, for even the most experienced advisors can learn from case studies.

University of Houston Academic Advisor Certification Program *Case Studies*

Case Study 1: Lisa

Lisa is a first time freshman in July orientation. She indicates that she wants to be a biology major. Her SAT math score is 400 and her verbal score is 410. She will need to take remedial course work in math and English. She is anxious to schedule her classes because she is afraid classes are filling up.

Case Study 2: Robert

Robert is an 18-year-old student who transferred last semester to the 4-year university. Records show 18 semester hours with a 3.0 GPA from a local community college. Last semester at the university he earned two failing grades and an incomplete. He was exempt from TSI due to high SAT scores. He lists himself as a communications major. He comes to the advisor to discuss his classes for the next semester.

Case Study 3: Sam

Sam began his university studies as an electrical engineering major and was suspended. He was readmitted as USD and intended to pursue a business degree. However, his cumulative GPA is 2.00 instead of the 2.75 required for admission into the business program. He now has a USD dean’s stop because he has earned 60 hours and must declare a major to enroll.

Sam took career assessment tests that showed he had an interest in social sciences. He took a variety of classes in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences but could not narrow his focus. He has interest in non-Class majors as well. He is concerned about majoring in a social science because he will need to go to graduate school to earn enough salary for his desired standard of living. Based on his GPA, graduate school may not be an option. He is desperate to complete his degree. He is also currently working 35 hours a week.

Sam is seeking advice about his options.

University of Alaska Fairbanks
Case Study

Case Study 1

Advisee:

Freshman Fall 2005 admit
Female
21 years old
No known disabilities
Fairbanks
Commutes to campus from her apartment
Alaska native
Works 20 to 25 hours a week at Denny's
Restaurant
Financial aid package

Fall Schedule

17 Credits
ENGL 111X Midsemester Grade of F
MATH 107X Midsemester Grade of F
HIST 100X Midsemester Grade of D
ANTH 100X Midsemester Grade of D
BIOL 105X Midsemester Grade of B

The student wants to withdraw from MATH and ENGL and add two late-drop courses.

Case Study 2

Advisee:

Fall 2003 admit
Male
23 years old
Lives in residence hall
White (Caucasian)
Probation Fall 2003

Fall 2004 and Spring 2005

Completed 27 credits (Freshman)
2.00 overall GPA
Enrolled 13 credits Fall 2006
Mid-semester grades Fall 2006 F, C, F, C

The student needs to register for spring 2006 courses.

The University of Iowa
Case Studies

Career Path

The Advising Center secretary tells Bill that Denise Butler has called to make an "emergency" appointment, even though it's finals week. "She said it was important," the secretary says, "so I brought you her folder. She'll be here in an hour." Bill reviews the folder. Denise, from a medium-sized high school, came to college as a pre-med major. Her ACT scores were English 18, Math 16, Reading 19, Science 19, with a Composite of 19 (SAT 860-880). She placed into remedial college algebra and took it the first semester but did not do well. She "couldn't understand the foreign teaching assistant." Denise complained bitterly that the situation was badly affecting her grade. Bill had referred Denise to the Math Department, where she was able to make a section change. Her grade still suffered, however, and unable to find a tutor and frustrated with the math lab, Denise ended up with a D- in the course.

In spring semester, Bill met with Denise frequently. At each meeting she had tentatively decided on a new major: first pre-dentistry, then pre-nursing, then pre-business. "I want something that's going to pay well; I can't see myself being poor," Denise reported.

At her spring registration appointment, Denise seemed to be settling in. She reported B's in her spring courses (general education), had visited the career development center, seemed firmly committed to a pre-business curriculum, and signed up for microeconomics and a business calculus course. There was "no way" she was going back to retake the algebra course in hopes of improving the original grade. "I was good in math in high school," Denise reported. "If this school would get more American teaching assistants it would make a big difference."

Before long, Denise arrives, out of breath. "I really wanted to see you before I go home," she says. "You're going to kill me, but...." She's decided to change career paths, she reports. Bill waits. He's thinking maybe she's decided to go back to pre-nursing (the choice before pre-business) after all.

"That's fine," Bill says smiling. "Tell me what you have in mind."

"Well, I went to the Career and Placement Office again and did some more reading, and I think I really found what I'd like to do."

"Which is?" Bill asks.

"I really want to be a judge," Denise says.

Father and Son

When fall midterm grade notices came out, Buster Brown showed F's in every course in which he was enrolled. Jack, his advisor, waded through the loud music on Buster's answering machine to leave several messages, but Buster did not call back until a week after the deadline for dropping courses. He told Jack there had been an unexpected death in his immediate family, but now that he was back on campus and had a chance to talk with his instructors, he was sure things would be okay. Jack expressed sympathy and outlined Buster's options (repeating the course in hopes of improving the grade, withdrawal) and asked him to keep in touch.

Buster came to see Jack 2 weeks later, saying he wanted to withdraw his registration because he was too far behind and certain to fail all his courses. Jack explained procedures and asked him to confer with his parents.

Several days later, Dr. Hightower, Buster's father called. He informed Jack he was a professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the college of medicine elsewhere and wanted to know why Jack was advising his son to "drop out of school."

Jack explained that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prevented discussion of the particulars of his son's case, but said he could explain the withdrawal procedure and the typical reasons why an advisor might suggest that a student withdraw his or her registration. Dr. Hightower said, "I understand completely. We have that at my school too. But we're both university people so we can ignore the Buckley Amendment." Jack reiterated that he'd need Buster's consent before discussing his case, but that he'd be happy to listen to anything Dad might want to say. He learned that Buster was Dad's stepson, had had a weak academic record in high school, had gotten into the "scrapes with authorities" that are typical of adolescent rebellion.

Jack got Buster back into the office that day and explained the conversation with his father, and Buster immediately gave Jack permission in writing to discuss Jack's situation with his father. Jack appreciated Buster's consent, because he felt it would prevent Buster playing him off against his father; Buster could no longer claim Jack was making him drop out.

When Dr. Hightower phoned back later that day, Jack remembered his customer service training and was quick to say, "I'm sorry about the death in your family. It seems to have upset Buster." There was a silence on the other end of the line.

"What death?" said Dr. Hightower. The phone line hummed.

"You mean no one died?" Jack said. "Uh. Let's talk about academic support." Dr. Hightower seemed grateful to have some information, saying he knew they could work together to help Buster succeed.

Buster came back in January, very thankful to be back on campus. He seemed to understand that he'd been given the opportunity to start over, a second chance. Jack helped him choose courses carefully; they came up with an interesting schedule well suited to Buster's interests and abilities.

Every 2 to 3 weeks Buster came to see Jack to discuss his academic progress. They discussed topics he was studying and projects he was doing in his classes, long-range plans, and academic goals. His father also called once a month and Jack always reviewed these conversations with Buster. When Buster came to register for the following fall, he said he thought he'd get all A's and B's. "Okay," thought Jack, "there is hope." But when he got Buster's grades he saw straight F's. Jack checked the computer and discovered that Buster had bounced a check for University bill.

Sean

Sean arrived at the university with an ACT composite of 31 and was admitted to the honors program. He came from a large high school and at summer orientation expressed an interest in political science. He said that while in high school he spent a lot of time volunteering at a local hospital and enjoyed helping people. He was personable although not especially outgoing.

Sean came to his initial meeting in September but did not return for his next scheduled appointment in October. He received midsemester notices of D's in philosophy, composition, and beginning French. When called, he said things were going well and he did not want to drop any classes. A few weeks later, Sean came in to register and he said things were still fine. When grades came out, Sean received an A in marching band, an A- in political science, and failed his philosophy, composition, and French courses.

Sean did not make a planning appointment second semester. He came in to drop two courses. When asked about the first semester, he said he had lost interest in several of his classes but things are going better now. Once he gets rid of these two classes, things will be fine. He said he would be back to plan for fall semester but he never returned. It is near the end of a long day during registration and the advisor just received a message that Sean has dropped in to be cleared to register.

What should the advisor say to Sean when he is squeezed in between the 3:20 and 4:00 appointment?

What should Sean be told if he returns for a longer appointment? How can he be convinced that these appointments are important?

Trevor

It is late on orientation day and Bill is about ready to see his final advising appointment, an entering first-year student. It's been a long day. Several complicated student cases have led to delays in each successive appointment. As he reviews again the folder for this final student, he notes that the situation seems to be fairly routine.

Trevor Johnson is a first-year student from a large Iowa high school. He is an exploratory major. He has no Advanced Placement or CLEP credit and straightforward test scores: an ACT composite of 24 (the institutional average). At 19, the ACT Math subscore may be a problem. "Well, if Trevor's not interested in a math or science major, we can wait on the quantitative and formal reasoning general education requirement," thinks Bill. Trevor's high school class rank is a little below average: 190 out of 325 students. He had taken a fair amount of French in high school. Bill begins to imagine a schedule that will help Trevor ease into college: rhetoric (required) and a few general education courses—perhaps sociology, a historical perspective, or possibly a third semester of French, depending on his foreign-language placement test score.

Trevor arrives, completed trial class schedule in hand. He's eager, wired. His eyes have a certain level of intensity about them. He begins to talk about his many interests: languages, travel, and skateboarding. Bill glances at the trial class schedule Trevor has placed on the table in front of him and reads it upside down, noting with dismay that the list of courses includes some surprises: Calculus I, Computer Science I, and first-year Russian! Bill realizes that Trevor hasn't stopped talking. "Anthropology is probably my first love," Trevor says, "so I'm going on a dig next summer." Trevor keeps talking as Bill nods and shifts the trial class schedule to read the rest of the list: upper level French and a history course. No rhetoric to be found. That makes 18 s.h. on his primary schedule when the limit for entering first-year students is 16 s.h. First-year Japanese and Hindi are on his course alternates list.

When Bill finally gets a word in and is able to ask a few questions, he finds that Trevor completed three semesters of high school French and performed at C level. His foreign-language placement test suggests that a review course is in order. Trevor admits to not being a "math guy" but is interested in computer science and will likely double major or minor

in it—hence the calculus and computer science courses. Trevor notes that rhetoric just "didn't fit in my schedule," and says he's to do that second semester. Oh, and by the way, he's always wanted to learn Russian; he couldn't wait to get to the university to be able to take that course. Bill nods, sighs, and thinks about where to begin.

John

John is very upbeat at orientation. His high-school academic profile is not outstanding, but his grades and test scores do not raise any red flags. John indicates that he would like to plan on a 5-year graduation plan with a more relaxed load each semester. John seems very happy with his first semester schedule that includes rhetoric, a history course, and a political science class. Two weeks into the semester his advisor, Mary, receives a form from the Student Disability Services office. Mary reads the form with a sinking feeling; apparently John has learning disabilities and will find challenging courses, among others, with heavy reading loads, heavy analytical content, and multiple choice tests. Mary is relieved to see that not all the challenges boxes are checked. She thinks back to orientation when John told her "I LOVE to read and history is my favorite subject!"

Mary begins to think about how to advise John. His interests are in history, political science, and philosophy. All of these areas will involve heavy reading schedules, yet this is where John indicates he will be happiest. Mary wonders if the extra year will provide the cushion John needs.

Mark

Loren is meeting with Mark, a student athlete, to discuss courses for the upcoming semester. Mark is an art major. During the conference, Mark reports being disgusted by his colloquium professor. When Loren asks why, Mark shouts "Because he is gay!" Colloquium is a required course that Mark cannot drop.

About 10 minutes are left in the appointment when Mark divulges this information and the two of them still need to finalize course selection. How should Loren work with Mark?

Loren did a remarkable job with Mark. Mark decides to deal with the situation and when Loren next meets with him, Mark says that he has enjoyed colloquium and has really enjoyed working with the professor. However, in the subsequent semester, during the third week of classes, Mark is in Loren's office to discuss dropping another art class because "the professor is queer."

What approach should Loren take with Mark? Are referrals appropriate? What if Loren is an advisor who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered?

Second Language

Dot met Win at a transfer orientation program right before classes began in the fall. He had immigrated to the United States from Vietnam 5 years earlier and was coming to the university with an associates of arts degree from a community college. His grades were good: A's and B's in Intermediate Algebra, Fundamentals of Communication, Pre-Calculus I, Composition I, Elementary French, and Introduction to Philosophy. He also did well in five racquetball and weight conditioning physical education classes. He received D's in General Chemistry, Macroeconomics, and Calculus II.

Win was full of energy, speaking rapidly, smiling, and nodding at everything Dot said. When Dot asked him about his interests, she had difficulty understanding his pronunciation. Win tried to explain where he was working, repeating the name of the business several times. "Is it a restaurant?" Dot asked. "A store?" Win talked on, describing his life, and Dot had the sinking feeling that she understood about 1 in every 10 words.

Dot registered Win for Engineering Calculus and Principles of Chemistry. She referred him to the College of Engineering for permission to take the Engineering I course. She also explained that Win's English language skills would be evaluated by the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Win nodded.

Three days later, Win returned without having obtained permission to enroll in Engineering I. He had his ESL report with him: He was required to take all five English classes. The evaluator had written, "Difficult to evaluate grammar due to pronunciation," with an exclamation point. Dot explained they would need to make room in Win's schedule for at least two of the ESL courses: pronunciation and grammar.

At midsemester, Win was doing less than satisfactory work in both his calculus and chemistry courses. He wanted to drop the chemistry and concentrate on calculus. This proved to be a good idea, because he eventually earned a B- in it. Dot also was delighted that Win also earned a B- in ESL Pronunciation, and a C+ in ESL Grammar.

Win wanted to attempt Principles of Chemistry again in the spring. Based on his fall grades, he obtained permission to take Engineering I. He also registered for the next three ESL courses. Dot began

to relax.

In a week, Win returned, wanting to drop ESL Conversation and add Engineering Statistics. Dot told him he could not drop any ESL course, a university rule. He was not happy about this, saying "But it is a waste of my time." Dot explained that he needed to keep his grades up to be admitted to Engineering and that the ESL courses also would help him communicate more clearly. She added, "I often have difficulty understanding you. Do you understand me most of the time?" Win nods.

Win returns 3 days later, very upset. He has had a car accident. It takes a long time for him to explain this to Dot. He has many bills, he explains, but has quit his job to devote himself full-time to school. He feels depressed. "I have no friend," he says.

Dot tries to sort all this out. She calls the Office of Services for International Students, only to discover that Win is not classified as an international student. She refers him to an office offering academic support services for minority students and to the Financial Aid office. She realizes that she should have referred him to those offices long ago.

Win comes back to see Dot, having arranged for tutoring and having obtained additional loans. He wants to drop Engineering I and add two physical education classes. He is vehement about wanting Tae Kwon Do. This is the one class he really wants! He says sadly that when he is in trouble there is nowhere to turn. Dot feels alternately sympathetic and exasperated with him. She then suggests local churches, the organization of campus ministries, social service agencies, Vietnamese student organizations, and the university counseling service. "It sounds as though you need support, understanding, and someone to talk to. Someone who is more qualified than I am to help you." Win nods. Dot writes down a list of phone numbers for him.

Three days later, Win is back. He waves a drop slip at Dot and says very loudly that it is absolutely necessary for him to drop the ESL conversation class. Dot tells him that even if she were to sign the slip, he would not be able to get the other required signature: Students are not allowed to drop ESL courses. Win says he cannot continue because the instructor hates him. "She gives me low grades because of the color of my skin," he says. Dot says, more adamantly, that Win needs this course very much and that ESL instructors teach people of all colors. He says he is absolutely not going to return to class: "No, no and finally, NO!" Dot watches his face through all this. She sees that he now regards her as part of his many problems.

University of Houston
Academic Advisor Certification Program
Case Studies

Case Study Review Questions

With each case study consider, make notes, and speak about the following questions:

1. What does the information given tell you about what might be issues for the student and what type of help he or she might need?
2. What do you want to know about this student and why?
3. What are possible issues with this student that need to be addressed?
4. How do we go about helping this student? What type of approach do you want to take with this student and why?
5. What are some of the referrals that might be made? What are some of the things you consider when determining whether or not the student is ready for these referrals?
6. What is the most effective way to make the referrals?
7. What university policies need to be explained to this student?