Concerns Related to the Advising Relationship

- The relationship is dynamic and is defined by the expectations, needs and interests of both student and advisor.
- Conflict is sometimes a part of the advising relationship. Engaging constructively in conflict can provide for diverse perspectives and positive outcomes.
- Clarifying expectations early in the relationship can minimize misunderstanding.

Personal Concerns

- Be clear about what you can and cannot do. Respect the student’s value system and culture.
- Recognize the limits of your role and refer to other professionals when needed.
- Refrain from making promises you cannot or may not be able to keep.
- If the student or others are in danger, you will need to act; so be cautious about promises of confidentiality.
- Doing something in response to a student’s concerns is almost always better than doing nothing.
- Students may be in a new and potentially disorienting day-to-day cultural context while some students also feel disconnected from their normal support groups.

General Guidelines for Taking Action

- Ensure privacy when you talk and choose a time when you are not preoccupied or rushed.
- Listen to the student in a sensitive, non-threatening way.
- Demonstrate your understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has said. Try to include both the content: “So you are new to this campus…” and the feelings: “…and you are feeling overwhelmed” as appropriate.
- Ask questions to better understand the scope and nature of the problem.
- Express concern in specific, non-judgmental, behavioral terms: “I noticed you haven’t been to class in three weeks” not “Where have you been lately?”
- Communicate hope by reminding the student that there are always options, and things tend to look different with time.
- Recommend resources appropriate to the situation. Consult the resource ahead of time if you are unsure or would like more information on how they might be helpful in a particular situation. Remind the student that using resources is a sign of strength and courage, not weakness or failure.
- Follow up in a reasonable length of time.
- Consult with other professionals by contacting any of the offices listed, especially if you are concerned about your safety or the safety of others.