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ESTABLISHED BY JAMES A. STAR '83

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Star Family Prizes for Excellence in Advising

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The mission of Harvard College is:
- to create knowledge
- to open the minds of students to that knowledge
- to enable students to take best advantage of their educational opportunities

Harvard realizes this mission in part by pairing students with academic advisers who provide them with close personal and intellectual guidance in every phase of their undergraduate careers. The impact of advisers on students can be both subtle and profound.

The Star Family Prizes for Excellence in Advising were established by James A. Star '83 to recognize and reward individuals who contribute to the College through their exemplary intellectual and personal guidance of undergraduate students.

In addition to the recognition they receive, winners of the prize also receive a stipend. In turn, we ask them to reflect on what, in their view, constitutes outstanding advising practice.

Though such practice can take many forms a few basic principles are widely held, as the words of this year's Star Prize winners reveal…

In the Category of Freshman Advising...

Brandon N. Edwards
Freshman Academic Adviser and Member of the Board of Freshman Advisers (BFA)
Department Administrator in the Freshman Dean's Office
Proctor in Thayer Hall

The phrase "academic advising" is, for me, constrictive. Many of my conversations with advisees focus on course and concentration selection, study habits, and examinations. Yet my own approach to advising is holistic. I take time at the beginning of the year for substantive conversations about secondary school experience, home and family, roommates, and long-term plans. At various points in the term, I try to help students take stock of their general well-being – eating, sleeping, and exercise habits – and how that can affect their performance in the classroom. Above all, it is important to me to know my students: what are their life goals? Which values do they espouse? What impact do they hope to make on the world? And how can I help guide them on a path – both academically and co-curricularly – to achieve all this? Most students seem eager for this kind of discussion and even those who have not considered these questions are open to thinking broadly about how to connect what they learn in the classroom to their lives beyond Harvard.

Yet, academic advising is not simply about the big picture – there are plenty of nuts and bolts involved as well. For instance, knowing the first-year curriculum well enables students to feel at ease in advising meetings and establishes a kind of mutual trust upon which other conversations develop during the year. I pledge to my advisees (and proctees) that I will make every effort to answer their questions – no matter how "routine" – in a timely fashion. Yet, when I set expectations at the beginning of the year, I also remind students that I will not always have the answer(s). Instead, I make a second promise, to connect them, when necessary, to the wider advising network at Harvard.

This brings me to my final point: while I am not able to serve as a student's academic adviser for their four years at Harvard, I let them know as their freshman year draws to a close that my door remains open to them both during and after their time in Cambridge. I try, if possible, to stay in touch to provide not only academic, but career and personal advice as well. This approach, I have found, not only allows me to know students well and serve as a resource for them, but it enables me to continue working with them on life's big questions. I feel truly humbled to be able to do this day-in day-out with the greatest students.

In the Category of Freshman Advising...

Lynn Fitzgerald

Freshman Academic Adviser and Member of the Board of Freshman Advisers (BFA)
Executive Assistant to the Dean of Harvard College

After working at Harvard School of Public Health, I was new to Harvard College and the undergraduate experience when I was invited to become a freshman adviser.
I jumped at the chance to become more involved in this wonderful community while knowing I had a steep learning curve ahead of me to prepare for such an important role. The advising orientation and other freshman advisers helped me tremendously by sharing their knowledge, experiences, and the best go-to resources.

The real joy in my advising experience came when I met my students. Their excitement about being here and sense of wonder about the year to come motivated me to do whatever I could to make their first year successful. I made sure they knew I always had time for them and reached out regularly with emails or texts and informal lunches. I especially enjoyed meeting one-to-one as it gave me a chance to hear about family, friends, activities, plans, (and frustrations), as well as their hopes for the future. Having this background also made it easier to offer guidance on course selection, exploring concentrations, encouraging meetings with faculty, or just sending along a note of an event I thought they might like.

I think the real value of the advising process is to be with a student in their moment. It could be to listen, or provide encouragement, or point out helpful resources. My aim was to encourage them to explore the vast opportunities available to them and, most importantly, to feel like they belong here.

In the Category of Freshman Advising...

Mackenzie Lowry

Freshman Academic Adviser and Member of the Board of Freshman Advisers (BFA)
Proctor in Wigglesworth Hall
Candidate in the Harvard Health Careers Program

In my years of advising at Harvard I have learned a great deal about being an active and empathetic listener. As a residential adviser, I serve as an academic and personal adviser where students seek advice on an array of issues from what classes to take to family problems to friend fallouts to bad breakups and so on. I have learned that the best thing to do is to listen and ask productive, affirming questions and let students come to their own conclusions. This helps me understand where students are coming from along with underlying motivations and concerns, and allows for us to find a solution together that leaves the student feeling optimistic and confident about the next steps.

One of the best parts of advising is working with students to help create an exciting and flexible plan for what they would like to get out of their Harvard years and beyond. It's very important to me that my students feel excited about their time here and many of my advising conversations center on the idea of building a foundation for a personally rewarding and fulfilling life. With people who have a great deal of interests and talent, the most difficult part of college planning is figuring out exactly what -- of many options -- they would like to do. I often find that it's more productive to first identify a goal -- whether it's a career or a graduate program or a summer opportunity -- and then plan from there. Of course, this is knowing all the while that plans and dreams can change, so the important part of these conversations is the process of self-reflection and searching for opportunities that offer meaning and value -- both during and after Harvard.

In the Category of Sophomore Advising...

Asad Asad

Sophomore Adviser
Resident Tutor in Fellowships at Mather House
Ph.D. Candidate in Sociology

Counter-intuitively, the first step to successful advising has nothing to do with advice-giving. Rather, successful advising requires that students view you as an approachable and sensitive mentor, which can be accomplished in your very first meeting. During this time, it is important to make clear that advising is a dynamic relationship and depends on both your and the student's commitment to making the relationship work. Your aim is to come prepared to each meeting to discuss whatever concerns they would like to address in a way that is sensitive to their needs and time. The same should be expected of the student. As the mentorship continues, you will realize that the student will reach out more proactively to seek counsel from you because they view you as dependable and capable of resolving whatever issue they are thinking through at the moment. As they say, first impressions matter, and your first meeting with a student will lay an important groundwork for a dynamic, sensitive, and respectful advising relationship that is rewarding for the adviser and the advisee alike.

In the Category of Sophomore Advising...

Elena Lisitskaya

Sophomore Adviser; Tutor in Leverett House

I discovered the best advising practices by trial and error: having gone to college and graduate school outside the U.S., I had not been exposed to academic and residential life at an American college prior to my work as a Resident Tutor. In the beginning I was nervous since I did not have personal experience comparable to that of my advisees to use as a frame of reference, but eventually I realized that this was a blessing in disguise.

I delved into the available advising resources. I forged my advising persona from scratch. I researched Harvard undergraduates as a Linnaean species: read through comments in the Crimson, ISYH and other fora in order to better understand students' views, concerns and issues.

There is another way my background was helpful: while I consider my own career a successful one, my thinking about what constitutes success in general has little to do with standard "recipes for success". One thing that students appreciate about me as an adviser is being receptive, encouraging and respectful about them taking untrodden paths.

As I spent more time with students, I realized what wonderful talented people they are. Little about college are they unable to figure out on their own. What they need most are not directions, but rather a listening ear. I am a springboard for students to bounce ideas off of without risk of being judged. Of course I will offer my opinions and warn of potential pitfalls, but I will not judge them as their parents or classmates may. Undergraduates at Harvard operate under a lot of peer pressure and in some cases pressure from their families. I see it as a part of my job to relieve this pressure.

I have also advised students with a very exact idea of what they wanted to achieve in college and beyond. My strategy has been to keep my involvement within the limits preferred by the undergraduate. Beginning advisers may think their job is to affect the life of every one of their advisees. Not me. I believe that some students do better with fewer people hovering over their shoulder.

I have spoken above about the Harvard undergraduate as a "Linnaean species", but I am acutely aware that each student is a unique personality and requires an individual approach. It takes time and effort to develop a personal approach and a personal connection.

Lastly, while Harvard students are all smart and independent young people, there may be a time in everyone's life when they need a hug, a pat on the back, or a cup of hot tea. I see it as part of my job to ensure that my advisees see me not only as an academic or professional resource, but also as a source of support in situations when they would rather not go to their friends for solace.

In the Category of Sophomore Advising...

Jay Miller

Sophomore Adviser
Pre-Medical Adviser in Adams House

I am honored to have received this award and feel truly humbled, particularly since I have so often been on the receiving end of useful advice about my own life and career from other tutors, both as an undergraduate and as recently as last month! The nurturing, caring examples of engagement with students that I have seen from other tutors in my house and from the Masters, have informed and inspired me. While I am still very much in the process of figuring out my advising style and approach, I have found that setting the stage well at the beginning of the year makes an important difference. Whether we explicitly acknowledge it or not, temporary matters - we often invest less in relationships that we know will be temporary. I like to refer to sophomore advising as "house advising," emphasizing that, if the students choose, I am happy to be their adviser throughout their time in Adams House - as a source of additional advice on topics they may not choose to discuss with their concentration adviser. Not all of my advisees take me up on this offer. But I find it helpful to make clear at the outset that house advising can be much more than a bridge to concentration advising.

The second thing I like to emphasize is that pretty much any topic can be on the table for our conversations - academic issues of course, but also extracurriculars, summer opportunities, family issues, relationships, personal issues, questions of identity, etc. Without setting that expectation, I'm not sure that students would feel that that is the role of their house adviser. I also think that students feel a lower barrier to bringing up personal issues with tutors than with other advisers at the college. To reinforce the point, I tell students that, for something important, they can call me anytime, day or night (in case you're wondering, I haven't been deluged with 3am calls about study cards!).

Setting initial expectations is a bit like the serve in tennis - it's the one shot that you fully control. After that, you may be scrambling to respond, and hitting shots out of position and on the run. I've certainly bumbled my way through my share of advising conversations. But I hope that by putting it in the context of a long-term advising relationship, my advisees will forgive my unforced errors, and continue giving me the chance to learn from them and improve.

In the Category of Concentration Advising...

Margo Levine

Concentration Adviser
Assistant Director of Undergraduate Studies in Applied Mathematics

Even though we devote significant resources to advising, reaching individual students in the crowd remains a challenge. I am the official adviser for about 50 students in Applied Math, and I am an advising resource for the remaining 200. Due to the large numbers I often have a hard time putting a name to a face, although when prompted I can usually recall a few specific details about their particular situation. The APO Advising Network Portal is a crucial resource for me, I use it to jog my memory before every meeting or responding to a student's email. I know a small minority of students very well, students I've established strong relationships with over the years, and I suspect I'll be in touch with these students for many years to come, long after they've left Harvard.

I try to make my individual student meetings an escape from daily distractions, both for me and for the students. I try to give every student my undivided attention. I don't have a clock in my office for this reason. I smile a lot and I try to engage even when I don't feel like it, especially during my 20th conversation of the day about course selection during study card week. I am trained as a scientist, and I think that students should be resourceful and find information that we tabulate and make available specifically for them online. So the scientist in me often wants to point them to a website but that is not what I should do as an adviser, so I don't.

Most importantly, students often ask me what they should do, and my job as an adviser is to never directly answer that question. The most I will say is something like "this is what was right for me and it may or may not be right for you." I can't say what's right for another person. But I am confident that in most cases, an unpressured conversation (or many) will end in the student answering the question for themselves.

In the Category of Concentration Advising...

Chenoweth Moffatt

Concentration Adviser
Academic Program Manager in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences

Harvard students just don't happen to come to Harvard. They've worked hard to be admitted, to be invited to join a community of "the best of the best." So sometimes they think they ought to know everything, and that's just not true. There are questions they need answers to and we try to create an environment in which they feel comfortable enough to ask them. "Who's interested in what I'm interested in?" "Who can help me figure out what I might be interested in?" They need someone to point them in the right direction and make the right connections for them, and that's where I come in. That's my role: to be accessible; to be welcoming; to create an environment in which they feel that it's okay to be students and not know everything.

Working with undergraduates is the best part of my job. My door is always open to them and I'm always happy to see them walk through it because they're the ones who bring the energy to the department, to Earth & Planetary Sciences. And that's their role. They're expansive, and they pull me out of my day-to-day to-do list. And they do this for everyone, our faculty and staff. It's the students who bring the fun, the new ideas. "Can we order Union Suits for the department?" "Can we plan a field trip to Nantucket to look at coastal erosion?" "What can we do to reach out to high school students to let them know how cool science is?"

This is an exchange. We're giving them ways to learn and grow and they're giving right back. I think that's the most important thing for an adviser to know. Advising goes back-and-forth; it's not one way.

In the Category of Concentration Advising...

Gregg Tucci

Concentration Adviser
Co-Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology
Senior Lecturer on Chemistry and Chemical Biology

Advising is one of the most important and rewarding things I do. There is nothing routine or algorithmic about advising, every conversation is different. Yet I advise everyone in the same way because at its heart advising is about possibility. This may bring to mind lofty possibilities like growing and reaching goals. But these goals and these possibilities are tied to everyday questions like what courses should I choose, how am I going to get these three problem sets done by Monday, or why don't I know what I want to do? Our advisees can answer these questions through our challenge and support. Challenge to help them generate possible solutions, goals, and futures, and support to help them see that what they want to do is actually possible! But there is one caveat here. Harvard is a busy place and if we want to help our students we must reach out to them as much as or even more than they reach out to us. And when I do this I do it with a spirit of humility because I don't care how many times a student misses an appointment, comes late or needs to reschedule. Their time is more important than mine. The opportunity to help them to persevere, create, change and flourish is deeply rewarding and I wake up every day wondering how I got the best job in the world.

In the Category of Faculty Advising...

Jorie Graham
Faculty Adviser
Boylston Professor of Oratory and Rhetoric in the Department of English

"Listen"

&

"Inspire"

In the Category of Faculty Advising...

Caroline Light

Faculty Adviser
Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality

My approach to advising undergraduates is to prioritize students' acquisition of skills, experience, and information to help them feel empowered to make decisions about their own academic futures. I try to be non-directive in advising meetings, and I have high expectations for students' active participation in researching different intellectual pathways, even if that means simply taking the time to explore the relevant concentration information on-line before meeting with me. It's clear that Harvard students want very much to make the most of the College's substantial resources and opportunities, and most of them benefit from an intensive brain-storming session in which they can share their ideas and ambitions with an experienced mentor. I find in these cases that careful listening goes a very long way. Often, when students have a safe space in which to share their intellectual dreams and passions, they find their own curricular paths to satisfaction.

In the Category of Faculty Advising...

Maria Polinsky

Faculty Adviser
Director of Undergraduate Studies and Head Tutor in the Department of Linguistics
Professor of Linguistics

The opportunity to advise many wonderful people as they pursued a remarkable range of terrific projects has been one of the great joys of my academic career. As a linguist, I recognize that languages are predictable, but people are not. But I also know that even a few relatively simple rules can engender an amazing diversity of expression. In advising others, I have tried to guide myself with two simple assumptions. First, I assume that my students will be smarter than me. If I don't understand something they say or write, that may be about me. But it may also be a good guide that others not deeply enmeshed in the work will face a similar challenge. My second assumption is a more universal one - I do my best to do unto others as I would have them do unto me. It is intriguing how much things change when I imagine that the tables are turned and I am the advisee.

I have been blessed to advise on projects which have taught me new ways of looking at problems, and indeed exposed me to problems I would never have otherwise encountered. I am gratified to be a Star Prize recipient, and I can only hope that I will continue to have the opportunity to be as enriched by my students in the future as I have been over these past years.

Congratulations to all Nominees

Isha Agarwal • Tim Ahfeldt • Sandy Alexander • Kate Anable • **William Anderson** • Bina Arch • Eleni Arzoglou • Michael Ball • Mahzarin Banaji • **Chiwen Bao** • Matthew Basilico • Josh Bell • **Andrew Berry** • Ted Betley • Kristin Bevington • **Sujata Bhatia** • Lauren Bimmler • Shane Bobrycki • Amy Bond • Josh Bookin • Erin Boyle • Helen Bradshaw • Geller Brandon • Adam Braskich • Kelly Brock • Stephen Burt • Kevin Caffrey • Caitlin Casey • Giuliana Chamedes • Gillian Chase • Mihir Chaudhary • Yiling Chen • Amy Chen • Kendell Clement • Eleanor Craig • Tirthankar Dasgupta • Akshita Deora Puram • Carlos Diaz Rosillo • **Robert Doyle** • **Ryan Draft** • Kate Drizos • Danielle Early • Lisa Fountain • Melissa Franklin • Dennis Gaitsgory • Kiran Gajwani • Brandon Geller • Howard Georgi • Luis Girón-Negrón • Rita Goldberg • Warren Goldfarb • Trey Grayson • David Harrington • Ernest Hartwell • Alex Henley • Jane Herr • Anne Hillier • Carole Hooven • Charles Houston • Evelyn Hu • Alex Hugon • Tony Jack • Sheila Jasanoff • David Johnston • Sasha Kimel • Evan Kingsley • Raphael Koenig • Carolann Koleci • Scott Kominers • Laura Lagomarsino • Brooks Lambert-Sluder • Stephen Lassonde • Nicole Le Blanc • Anne Le Brun • Luke Leafgren • Nicole LeBlanc • Anne LeBrun • Harry Lewis • Emily Lin • Chip Lockwood • **Hermioni Lokko** • Christopher Lombardo • Susan Lyons • **Francis MacDonald** • **Zarin Machanda** • Kevin Madore • Geoff Marietta • Sky Marietta • Deirdre Mask • Rachel Meyer • Susanna Mierau • Luke Miratrix • Amanda Morejon • Michelle Morgan • Robb Moss • Nicole Newendor • Bernhard Nickel • Sasha Nikolaev • Mary Ogburn • Ayodeji Ogunnaike • Oded Oren • **Jason Outlaw** • Jennifer Page • Eva Payne • Katherine Penner • Jessica Perkins • Paul Peterson • Jeita Phillips • Scott Poulson-Bryant • Cian Power • Michael Ranen • Yakir Reshef • Kip Richardson • Jacob Risinger • Memory Risinger • Tobias Ritter • Jason Saretsky • Catherine Shapiro • Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington • Claire Sheldon • Marc Shell • Daisy Shih • Andrei Shleifer • Shambhavi Singh • Suzanne Smith • Annie Spokes • Naseem Surhio • Jessica Tollette • Tom Torello • Jane Unrue • Mark Van Baalen • Hugo Van Vuuren • Jasmine Waddell • Jim Waldo • Alex Wang • Linda Wang • Sylvia Warren • Ruth Watterson • Cheryl Welch • Dona Wong • Robert Wood • Nussaibah Younis • Vanessa Zoltan

***Names in **bold** are those of past winners who were renominated this year*

Special thanks to the many students who honored their adviser with a nomination, who shared their stories with us, and whose sentiments underscore the vital role of academic advising in promoting student success.

Time
Relationships
support
Perspective
Trust
Partner
Opportunities
Encourage
Interests
Responsiveness
Listening
Inspire
Passions
Flexible
Personal
Knowledge
Immersion
Engage
Honesty
Preparation
Dreams
Comfortable
Impact
Confidence
Questions
Moments
Problem
Goals
Patience
Guidance
Advice
Network
Encourage
Inspire
Listening
Responsiveness
Perspective
Partner
Trust
Time
Support
Relationships
Interests
Dreams
Opportunities
Perspective
Engage
Honesty
Preparation
Flexible
Personal
Knowledge
Immersion
Passions
Inspire
Encourage
Listening
Responsiveness