LSA Department Liaison Handbook

Rationale for the Liaison Relationship
When general advisors, concentration advisors, instructors (faculty, lecturers, GSIs), and administrative staff are talking with each other and working collaboratively, they make a big place smaller and more welcoming for LSA undergraduates, offer them the most accurate information possible, and cultivate ideas that can lead to both creative initiatives and more efficient procedures in general advising and the concentration departments. Such communication and collaborative effort helps to build and maintain community not only for students but for the entire network of instructors, advisors, and administrators collectively engaged in the educational enterprise. The benefits of these interconnected networks are multilayered and mutually reinforcing. Through continual contact and conversation, we all broaden our professional understanding of what students need and what can help them grow--interesting for us, and a clear benefit to them. And just as we encourage students to establish and then broaden their base of engagement, resources, and support, working with and across departments helps us to do the same in terms of our own professional responsibilities and development.

The liaison role is designed to offer a different (and hopefully broader) perspective on student choice, responsibility, and constraint to departments, as well as to serve as a catalyst for improvement in the engaging of students in intellectual community and the delivery of advising and student services. Such improvement could come in the form of a new program or service for students, increased efficiency or consistency in existing ones, or better coordination across units.

What is a General Advisor Liaison?
A general advisor liaison is responsible for initiating and building a relationship with one or two assigned LSA academic departments or academic support units. The liaison will identify and do outreach to the various constituencies of appropriate contacts in the assigned department, which may include Concentration Advisors (whether instructional or administrative staff), the Undergraduate Chair, department lecturers, GSIs, and faculty in general, and administrative staff. The liaison will make sure the department contacts understand the many kinds of conversations general advisors have with undergraduates throughout their years in the College and encourage the department contact(s) to refer students to our office. The liaison is also someone who expresses interest in learning about the department's curriculum, is familiar with its website, offers to pass along department course, policy, and curricular information to other general advisor colleagues, and in the role of consultant, encourages questions and conversation about these and other student advising issues, policies and procedures, and creative collaborative possibilities.

What is the Coordinator of Concentration Advising?
The Coordinator of Concentration Advising is responsible for overseeing the liaison relationship with LSA academic departments and academic support units, which includes the assigning of liaisons and serving as a resource for both liaisons and department contacts. He or she organizes events that bring departmental and general advisors together around training and topical issues of mutual interest. The Coordinator also maintains an email group of all departmental contacts through which information of concern to departments is disseminated.
### LSA Department Liaisons Overview

#### Best Practices

- Establish contact early and maintain it regularly.
- Keep rationale behind liaison relationship in view as you invite ongoing collaboration and dialogue.
- Stay informed about the department and set aside ½ hour per week to work on this.
- Express interest in staying connected and engaged in department developments and activities, especially related to departmental curriculum and advising.
- Find opportunities to maintain direct connection: attend all SAA-sponsored programs related to liaisons; ask to be added to departmental email group(s) and attend departmental events; follow up on emails from SAA leadership with dept contacts and admin staff, offering yourself as resource.
- Make notes about your liaison interactions and communications.
- Keep open and regular communication about your liaison work with your supervisor and the Coordinator of Concentration Advising.

#### Minimum Expectations

- At least once per year contact departmental administrative staff to gather any departmental updates, and discuss consulting opportunities (e.g. developing intellectual community among concentrators by involving them as fully as possible in departmental life; revising or developing print and web resources for concentrators) and awareness in the department of general advising resources; provide a specific agenda so appropriate preparation and other advisors and/or staff can be invited to participate.
- At least once per year meet with departmental contact and possibly other concentration advisors to gather any departmental updates, discuss consulting opportunities (e.g. developing intellectual community as previously mentioned, increasing or streamlining advising services and practices) and keep the department informed about general advising tools and resources (e.g. on-line file, concentration PTD and audit, etc.): provide a specific agenda so appropriate preparation and other advisors and/or staff can be invited to participate.
- Request to attend GSI training or pedagogy class and to have information about advising forwarded to all departmental instructional staff.
- Attend All SAA-sponsored programs related to liaisons, including the Advising Summit.
- Maintain regular (at least twice per term) contact with departmental contacts, advisors, and administrative staff.

#### Contact Timeline (suggested)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>Contact administrative staff in dept offices to discuss year goals, projects, and new developments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>Contact dept liaison and arrange meeting in late Sept or early Oct.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>Send welcome email to new faculty, GSIs, staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept/ Oct</td>
<td>Meet contacts and dept advisors in dept offices to discuss year goals, projects, and new developments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Attend Advising Summit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Inquire about courses and registration/waitlist procedures for Winter term.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>Meet with administrative and advising staff to debrief the liaison relationship during the past term.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>Meet contacts and advisors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>Attend courses; go to office hours to get to know some of the instructional staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Attend Concentration Fair: visit liaison dept(s) tables and sit and/or participate in advising conversations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>Inquire about courses and registration/waitlist procedures for Fall term.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Meet with administrative and advising staff to debrief the liaison relationship during the past term.</td>
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Preparing to be a Liaison

- Look at the department contacts list on the Intranet: (http://sitemaker.umich.edu/advisorhb.contact/saa_liaisons_and_department_contacts)
- Read what the department says about itself in the LSA Bulletin.
- Take a close look at the department's website (among other things, note to what extent the department addresses the liberal arts/career connection).
- If you are not particularly familiar with the department's curriculum, take the time to read as many of their course descriptions in the on-line Course Guide as you can.
- Find out if the department has a specific manual for its concentrators and if so, look through it.
- Consider what questions you most want to ask the department. (See page 7 below: “Suggested Questions for Meetings with Departments”.)
- If someone is handing off the liaison role for a particular department to you, be sure to talk with that person to pick up helpful information, strategies, anything the former liaison thinks you should know before contacting the department.

First Steps for New Liaisons:

- Take initiative by establishing contact as soon as you can once the former liaison or Coordinator notifies the department of the change in staffing. Introduce yourself; get on their radar; and set up an initial meeting, which can include the Coordinator if you wish.
- Make sure the contact knows in advance the kinds of things you want to talk about, so s/he can be prepared and can suggest other department members who should be part of the conversation. Suggest that you meet in person for an hour, either one-on-one, or (if there are personnel that you already know you want to connect with) a small group. You may begin by talking with one person, and realize there are others you should talk with as well. It can just be a timesaver if you meet with several people at once--and the conversation can go deeper and broader).
- Know something about the department when you have your first meeting (see Preparing to be a Liaison immediately preceding) and come with questions.
- In the first meeting:
  - Make sure the contacts understand the rationale behind the liaison relationship, and what you do as a general advisor. Invite them to ask questions about your work.
  - Express strong interest in learning more: about the department’s curriculum, any curricular changes pending or under discussion, initiatives in progress (especially related to undergraduate education), any pressing advising concerns/issues.
  - Express a willingness to attend/volunteer at some department events (emphasize the potential benefit of a general advising perspective).
  - Express an interest in attending department meetings, when appropriate, to give helpful perspective.
  - Express an interest in sitting in on any training for concentration advisors: a great learning experience for everyone.
  - Leave the meeting with a clear plan for regular communication and any specific next steps.
Beginning of the Year Steps for Continuing Liaisons:

Ask yourself if you have established the kind of rapport you want with your department. Look over the "First Steps for New Liaisons" and see if you have made the important clarifications and expressions of interest. Even if you have an ongoing relationship with the department, arrange a beginning of the year meeting to touch base, reconnect, look ahead together. Block out time on your calendar for liaison work. Given the highly demanding work commitment in the Newnan LSA Academic Advising Center, the challenge is to develop as much mutually satisfying rapport as possible with your liaison department(s) while not taking an unreasonable amount of time and attention away from your other on-going responsibilities.

1) Establish email or phone contact with your department contact(s) at the start of the academic year to introduce yourself, if necessary, and set up a meeting time. Email allows you to have a written record to help remember what's been said, so keep that in mind. Even if it's unlikely you will be able to meet until late September/early October, some kind of initial outreach is important to stay or get back on the department’s radar and take advantage of the energy of the start of a new year.

2) Meet with your department contact(s) in person, preferably for an hour, as early in the academic year as schedules will allow. Try to meet with all or at least several of the department concentration advisors at the same time, so more of them meet you and so you can encourage everyone to be on the same page with concentration advising. Not all departments bring their concentration advisors together to discuss advising issues, though this kind of gathering can create better consistency and uniformity in how departments work with students. So your presence can actually bring them together in productive ways. It’s good to go to them to do this, so you can see their undergraduate office set-up for yourself. Consider meeting with your contact(s) again at the end of the Fall term to discuss how things have gone (issues that have come up, student advising concerns, how the liaison relationship is working, new ways of working together, etc.), unless you all agree you can address everything adequately via email. There is nothing like a chance to sit down, face to face, and brainstorm how we can help each other with our respective projects and goals.

3) In late September or early October, send a welcome message introducing yourself to the new faculty/lecturers and GSIs in your department and welcome back to those who have been teaching in LSA. You will receive contact information and procedure/protocol from the Coordinator for Concentration Advising, as well as information about any programs on the horizon designed to train/educate/converse with LSA instructors and concentration advisors.
Maintaining and Enhancing the Liaison Relationship:

Contact and Communication

- If you and your department contact(s) don’t already have your own email group, suggest that you create one.
- If you are not already included in the department’s concentrator and/or advising email group, ask to be added to that group.
- Try to get on the departmental meeting calendar to hear about shifts coming down the road, offer your own perspective when appropriate, etc.
- Look for different ways to get to know and be known in a department—consider sitting in on some classes from time to time, learning about whether there’s a central gathering place for your department's students, attending events that involve the department's students (e.g. giving presentations of their work), etc.
- Look for different opportunities to meet with department contacts (e.g. spending some time at your contact's table at the Concentration Fair, attending or even helping out with departmental events, especially those for undergraduates).
- Plan to spend an average of 30 minutes each week doing some work related to your liaison assignment (looking at the department's website, familiarizing yourself with their courses, thinking about what questions or suggestions you may have, sending the occasional email to your contact(s), when appropriate).
- Keep at least some general notes on your liaison interactions so you can not only remember what has been discussed and what information you’ve passed along, but so you can also describe highlights of your liaison interactions (how you stayed in touch with your department, what issues you discussed, how you're working to strengthen that relationship, what kind of support you want/need to make it work better, etc.) in your Self-Evaluation.
- Though the Associate Director for Concentration Advising Programs and the Coordinator for Concentration Advising will be able to communicate with all departments through the department contacts email group, stay aware of what you might want to pass along to your department contact as helpful information. It’s important for the department contacts to know that they are building a relationship with not only the Newnan LSA Academic Advising Center in general, but with you as a representative of the Center.

Collaboration and Consultation

- Consider suggesting that you and advisors in your liaison department each sit in on the other’s meetings with students, both as observers and as active participants. For instance, you could hold joint appointments to declare students so that students get a better sense of the continuity and collaborative nature of advising once they have declared. Or, for large departments, a declaration event might be organized with several concentration and general advisors present. In this connection, you could encourage departments to make declaring feel like a genuine milestone in the students’ undergraduate career.
- Is the Career Center coming to your liaison department for one-on-one advising? Consider talking with the CC (Louise will make available the list of Career Center liaisons to LSA academic departments so you can know who to contact over there) and the department about doing some group advising, with you there, too.
• If after some conversations you think it would be helpful and interesting to sit down occasionally with one of your general advisor liaison colleagues and his/her contact department (if the two departments seem like naturals for talking with each other about student interests, issues, and/or concerns because of similar field, size, structure, etc.), talk with that liaison about the possibility of a group meeting. This may be a great way to have some liaison teamwork going on within the Advising Center, and a new way to build relationships among departments outside the larger programs and events.

• Look at the various kinds of advising options in departments (e.g. group advising, peer advising, etc.) and encourage experimentation to meet department goals and student needs.

• If you know of a departmental process or procedure that seems a bit cumbersome, suggest a way to make it work more smoothly to everyone’s benefit.

• Encourage maximum inclusion of undergraduates in departmental life and community, including but not limited to: Concentration Week open houses and panels, student invitations to department brown bags and candidate job talks, concentrator participation in curriculum committee discussions, departmental website content and design, any newsletter and print materials for students, forums for faculty-student interaction outside the classroom, forums for presenting students’ research, recognition of concentrators who have made the most of their undergraduate experience, and represent (in a range of ways) the best of what it means to engage passionately in the pursuit of a liberal arts education.

• Encourage departmental awareness and use of advising tools such as the on-line file (including the concentration PTD--not all departments have established one--and the audit that’s part of the on-line file) and the Advisor Handbook.

• Encourage departmental awareness and use of Advising (you, as liaison, and other Advising Center staff as appropriate) as an expert consulting resource for departmental advisors, administrative staff, and instructors on all issues pertaining to College requirements, policies, and procedures (including, for example, Standards Board and FERPA) as well as for problem solving around student, curricular, and other advising issues.

• When appropriate, encourage departments to coordinate both print- and web-based information for their concentrators: What do they currently offer students in this regard (especially with an eye to both quality and consistency of information)?; Is there a department and/or concentrator newsletter?; What's happening in the department that students should know about? And how is this information disseminated to students? Is there information about what alums from that department are doing, etc.?

• Encourage as much creativity as possible in departmental websites as a way expressing the life of the department in an engaging way for students (promote students who have done interesting things, include student quotes, etc.) Diplomatically make suggestions about what the department might want to think about (e.g. additions to website that will increase its clarity, helpfulness, and appeal to students; getting student feedback on the current site, etc.) How else might students themselves contribute meaningfully to the department website?
Suggested Questions for Meetings with Departments

Concentration Advising

- What is your role in the department besides concentration advising? (e.g. professor? lecturer? administrative assistant?)
- How does your work outside of concentration advising inform your concentration advising?
- As you see it, what are your department’s goals for concentration advising? What are your personal goals for concentration advising?
- When a student comes to you undecided about the concentration, what questions might you ask to help the student determine if this is indeed the right concentration choice for him or her?
- Do you find that students sometimes have misconceptions about your discipline? If so, what are they, and how do you give them a more accurate view?
- What kinds of issues/concerns do you believe are important to address during concentration advising appointments?
- What questions do students frequently ask during concentration appointments? What questions should they ask?
- Do you talk with students about internship/career opportunities and resources? Does your department provide such resources, and if so, what are they?
- Are there any questions/issues that students bring up that you don’t feel prepared to address?

Departmental Information

- What new courses will the department offer this year? What should we know about them?
- Can you highlight particular courses in the department appropriate for students with certain interests—things that may not be obvious?
- What special opportunities or programs are available to majors in your department? Are any of these opportunities available even to interested non-majors?
- What tutoring resources does your department offer? Are there any organizations (e.g. fraternities, etc.) on campus that offer free tutoring for your courses?

Student Involvement

- Are there certain ways in which your department makes itself a “home” to your concentrators? What has been most effective in establishing this connection with students?
- Are students currently involved in departmental committees (curriculum, search, etc.)
- Is there a student group or organization in your department?
- Are there peer advisors?
- Are there any opportunities for student presentations?
- How and what do you communicate to your concentrators?
Liaison Relationship

- What questions would you like to ask general advisors about their role in students’ academic progress?
- Is there anything you would like us to emphasize when talking with students interested in your discipline?
- Who else in the department can I talk with to get a helpful perspective on the discipline and a solid sense of issues that involve students?
- Is it possible to sit in on any concentration appointments? Would you like to sit in on a few general advising appointments?
- Would it be helpful to you to hear some constructive feedback about your department website from me? Do you ask your concentrators for suggestions about how to make the site most appealing and helpful?
- If there is concentration advisor training in your department, can I participate?
- Can I attend your pedagogy class or GSI training to give a brief overview of general advising issues and resources? Or, would you be willing to disseminate this information to your instructors?
- What’s the next step? How to keep up an on-going conversation? What can be done effectively through e-mail? Do you want to set up another meeting for the end of the term? What seems to make most sense?
Problems with your liaison department?

Is your department unresponsive or annoyed at any preliminary efforts you’ve made with them? Is there a difficult student issue or situation that has arisen? Is there anything else that is making you uncomfortable about your work with the department? First talk with the Coordinator for Concentration Advising, then the Associate Director for Concentration Advising Services. Depending on the situation, one of them can intervene or talk with you about what you might try, and when appropriate, facilitate a conversation and collaboration with other liaisons who have been particularly successful in building a liaison relationship under challenging conditions.

Even if there are no particular difficulties or challenges with your department(s), let your supervisor and the Coordinator know on a regular basis how things are going with the liaison work, and if you need any particular support.
Letter to Undergraduate Chairs

Dear Undergraduate Chairs and Associate Chairs,

We are writing to seek even greater collaboration with your department on matters that may have a significant impact on our undergraduates. We are proposing a Newnan LSA Advising Center initiative to work with departments to enhance community-building efforts with undergraduates and to share successes with other departments across the College. Many departments have expressed strong interest in creating a departmental "home" for their undergraduates, and this initiative will support that goal in numerous ways.

For years now, academic advisors in the Advising Center have been serving as liaisons to the academic departments, and have provided a conduit for information exchange, assistance to department faculty and administrators in their role as advisors, and support and referral for concentrators. Liaisons have maintained contact with the departments’ faculty or administrative coordinators of advising and have offered a range of information and advice. This has included using the on-line file and audit checklist, disseminating information about department curriculum to colleagues in the Advising Center, counseling faculty and administrators who bring concerns about students to their attention, and answering questions about LSA student academic issues or College policy. In a nutshell, advisor liaisons have assisted department advisors in creating the best possible educational experience for students.

As undergraduate chairs, you have strong involvement in your undergraduate concentrators’ experience in your department and we urge you to use the liaison relationship to its fullest potential. Your partnership with the Advising Center liaison can assist you in exploring possibilities perhaps not yet considered for strengthening your concentrators’ engagement both within your discipline and beyond the classroom. A few of those ideas:

- post-Concentration Fair open houses and panels
- student invitations to department brown bags and candidate job talks
- concentrator participation in curriculum committee discussions
- department newsletter development
- department website enhancements that may increase its value and appeal to concentrators
- forums for faculty-student interaction outside the classroom
- forums for presenting students’ research
- recognition of concentrators who are making or have made the most of their undergraduate experience, and represent (in a range of ways) the best of what it means to engage passionately in the pursuit of a liberal arts education

We encourage you to develop and deepen your department’s collaboration with the Advising Center, always with a view to providing our undergraduates students with engaging intellectual community, accurate and timely information, and efficient administrative procedures. For example, if your advisors are finding it difficult to meet the demands of one-on-one advising, the liaison can assist you and your advising coordinator in exploring ideas about group advising programs and information sessions as a foundation for individual concentration
advising. Also worthwhile might be coordinated opportunities to introduce GSIs and new faculty to advising practice and its resources in the College.

We are asking Dr. Chris Luebbe, the Newnan Coordinator for Concentration Advising and a former concentration advisor, to be in touch with you about utilizing your Advising Center liaison as a “consultant” for your community-building activities and any initiatives you would like to pursue with the Center’s support. Chris has already established contact with your advising coordinator. He and the general advisor liaison to your department look forward to working with you in our ongoing mutual effort to enhance engagement of and service to concentrators in the College.

Sincerely,

Esrold Nurse  
Assistant Dean, Student Academic Affairs

Tim Dodd  
Director of the Newnan LSA Academic Advising Center