CUNY Start Advisement — Core Values and Practices

CUNY Start advisement integrates the apprenticeship model of CUNY Start Reading and Writing, which enables students to develop metacognitive awareness and control over successful learning strategies, with the discovery-based approach of CUNY Start Math, where a student learns to construct his/her own understanding of college success. Rather than being prescriptive, advisors engage students in a self-reflective process that helps them to assess their physical and social context, individual strengths and challenges that may impact their academic and other aspirations. As students gain fuller self-awareness within the context of college, advisors teach a problem-solving process to determine a first-year plan for success and scaffold the steps, as is done in academic classes. Students learn to assess their problem-solving strategies, and revise them as needed.

CUNY Start advisors work with students both individually and in a weekly seminar to develop and implement an individualized plan to ‘survive and thrive’ in their first year of college. In both contexts, advisors focus on three interdependent areas of college success: academic content, academic behaviors, and academic systems. Their content targets key skills and include developing habits of successful college students, using college communication skills and self-advocacy in order to navigate key campus resources, and academic and tuition planning. The following core values are central to CUNY Start’s approach to advisement:

Holistic Engagement
CUNY Start advisors support student academic and interpersonal success by fostering a capacity for continuous growth and transformation. This attention to developmental advising integrates students’ social and academic needs and supports adjustment and persistence through the many facets of a college environment. Elements of holistic engagement that are core to the Seminar curriculum and Advisement practices include:

- Proactively meeting with students to develop and nurture an action-oriented, supportive advisement relationship
- Exploring and understanding the impact of student identity, personal strengths and challenges on potential academic progress and engagement in the college environment
- Addressing student needs through strength-based support and intervention
- Cultivating an incremental expectation of growth that supports students through the stages of change
- Focusing Seminar lessons on problem-solving strategies rather than prescriptive information about college
- Using growth-oriented feedback that praises student effort over achievement, and attention to process over outcomes
Inquiry
CUNY Start advisors use inquiry as a means of developing the “language and thinking” of successful college students. Elements of inquiry that are core to the Seminar curriculum and Advisement practices include:

- Posing meaningful questions that gauge student sense-making, and stimulate thinking and awareness about ideas and processes central to college success (i.e., academic and tuition planning, matriculation, and campus resources)
- Asking open-ended questions to provoke and sustain student reflection about their experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness that manifest in academic and personal choices
- Using progress-oriented questions to guide students in mitigating obstacles to goal achievement
- Using open-ended questions to stimulate vital and ongoing rethinking and reflection in developing their individual plan to survive and thrive in their first year of college
- Using inquiry as an instructional practice to model, scaffold, and provide independent practice in order to gain control over the use of strategies used by successful college students to help them navigate and evaluate college resources and manage their time effectively

Collaboration
CUNY Start advisors work in partnership with students and with other staff in CUNY Start, at the college, and in the community as a means of maximizing our shared knowledge and bringing greater value to our work with students. Elements of collaboration that are core to the Seminar curriculum and Advisement practices include:

- Partnering with students from the point of initial contact during recruitment to departure, assisting students with next steps regardless of whether they complete, withdraw or are dismissed from the program; even dismissal presents an opportunity to rehearse self-awareness and problem-solving skills and is done without judgment.
- Collecting, analyzing, and sharing data (such as student and teacher feedback, classroom observation, and formative assessment) as a means of understanding student assets. This focus helps to inform and catalyze student strengths they will need to enact positive change.
- Building students’ capacity to bond, bridge, and link various resources needed for academic persistence in order to encourage self-efficacy and connectedness