

# Student Retention & Success Newsletter

## Enhancing Students' College Experience through Advising

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*The following is an excerpt from a summary of a presentation prepared by Dr. Richard J. Light, Harvard University, to the National Academic Advising Association, June 2003.*

**1. Interactive relationships organized around academic work are vital.** A common wisdom exists that the best advice for students, in addition to attending classes and doing homework, is: **get involved in campus activities.** This is excellent advice that I continue to share with my own advisees. Yet there is a different kind of involvement, a more subtle kind that is stressed by the happiest and academically most successful undergraduates.

Nearly without exception, these students have at least one, and often more than one, intense relationship built around academic work with other people. Some have it with a professor. Others have it with an advisor. Some build it with a group of fellow students outside of the classroom. The critical point is that this relationship is not merely social. Nearly without exception, students who feel they have yet to 'find themselves' report that they have not developed such relationships.

To build these relationships, advisors should encourage students to work in small study groups outside of classes. While this may be easier to implement on residential campuses than on commuter campuses, it is still important for students to meet and work collaboratively on their academic assignments especially

for classes in math, engineering, the sciences, and courses requiring writing.

**2. Students value strong writing skills. Many benefit enormously from specific suggestions.** Of all the skills students want to strengthen, **writing is mentioned three times more than any other.** Students who improve their writing describe an intense and fairly specific process working with a professor, a writing teacher, or most often with a small group of fellow students who meet regularly to critique on another's writing. The longer this work-related engagement lasts, the greater the improvement.

A key finding that differentiates students who improve their writing from those who improve little, is how they cope with requests from a faculty member to "revise" their work based upon the faculty member's comments and suggestions. The unspoken fact is that many first year college students simply don't know **HOW to revise!** If they did, they would have done a better job in the first place! Helping students learn how to revise, may seem somewhat out of an advisor's "job description," but may turn out to be one of the most productive interactions students can have with an advisor.

*See Page 4 for tips from Dr. Rich Miller, English Dept., on how to help your advisees revise papers.*

## First Year Experience Student Issues April Happenings

### Possible Issues/Concerns

Increasing thoughts /deliberations about suicide occur from an inability to cope with the pressures of academic and social expectations.

Academic pressures increase with the end of the semester approaching. Paper and hours exams approach.

Summer job pressures continue.

Financial strain from spring break affects social life.

Many students are forced to select a major and are not sure what field they would like to enter.

Social life pressures increase during this time period—formal dances, parties, concerts.

Everyone wants to fall in love. Many students go through rejection or the fear of rejection or envy towards their friends who have successfully found a significant other.

Frustration from being ill because weather changes so dramatically.

Students tend to become disenchanted with many normal services and food service is the primary target. They tend to get tired of eating “the same old institutional food”.

## Late Course Withdrawal

submitted by Ann Coyne, Associate Dean of Students

If students talk to you about a late course withdrawal, you should first have a discussion with students about their grades and determine if there are any possibilities to salvage this course. At the instructor’s discretion, if the student has completed more than 50% of the course work satisfactorily and there is a reasonable expectation that all the course requirements can be completed in one academic year, you may choose to issue the student an incomplete grade.

The student also has the opportunity from March 31 – April 16, to submit a late course withdrawal form through the Dean of Students Office. If the request is approved, the student will receive a grade of “W.”

Beginning April 17, a student may also request a late withdrawal, but will also need faculty

approval. In addition to the late course withdrawal form, the Dean of Students Office will give the student a late course withdrawal petition. The student must bring this petition to the faculty member for his/her approval. Please be sure to check either the “I approve” or “I do not approve” box and sign the form. The faculty member may give the form back to the student who will deliver it to the Dean of Student’s Office. Please note: There is a space on the late course withdrawal petition for the department chair to sign, but the chair’s signature is not required.

If approved, the Dean of Students Office will forward the late course withdrawal form and petition to the Registrar’s Office and the student will issued a grade of “W.” No petitions for late course withdrawals can be filed once the student has taken the final exam.

## How Late can a Student get a Tutor?

submitted by Michael Dickinson, Director, Ballotti Learning Center

As finals near and end-of-semester projects and papers increase, the demands on academic support services increase as well. One common challenge for all of our academic support centers is providing assistance to those students who have put off getting help and who may have unrealistic expectations about the work necessary to save a grade. We want to affirm students’ decisions to seek assistance without reinforcing their false hope of the quick fix.

In the Ballotti Learning Center (BLC), students meet with an educational consultant before being assigned to a tutor to help ensure that the students have realistic expectations for what can be accomplished with a tutor. We will not be able to help every student improve a grade. Hopefully, we can make enough progress that students see the benefits of the support services and start using resources earlier the next time around. As mentioned before in this column, we can be much more effective functioning as an academic fitness center rather than an emergency room.

When referring students for assistance, please note that the last day of tutoring differs among Suffolk’s various support centers. Both the Math & Computer Science Support Center and Second Language Services offer tutoring through finals week. In the BLC, educational consultants are available through finals week to help students assess their options and to make a plan for success; however, the last day to be matched with a new tutor is April 16<sup>th</sup>. Both the BLC and the Writing Center offer tutoring through the last day of classes but do not schedule tutoring appointments during finals week so that the tutors, who are all full-time students, can focus on their own classes and finals.

# Chalk Talk

Excerpts printed from [Chalk Talk](#) with permission of author Donna Qualters, Director of Suffolk University Center for Teaching Excellence

## Multiple Choice Testing— Smart or Lazy Teaching?

A recent study showed that new instructors needed almost 30 minutes per question to construct a “good” multiple choice exam. Multiple choice tests are good when you want to test the breadth of student learning. They are also good when you want to test different levels of learning around a concept to see if students have not only understood a concept, but can use it as well. Multiple-choice tests can also be effective when it is not necessary for you to determine **HOW** they formulated their answer, only that they **CAN** formulate the answer.

**Benefits include:** easy to grade, you can correlate specific questions to specific learning objectives for your course and feedback on areas of your curriculum if a large percentage of students fail a specific question that is well constructed. You can also compare performances from class to class or year to year if you have a large reliable question bank. Construction of a meaningful multiple choice test is very difficult and time consuming, so don't wait until the day before the test to decide to use this format.



## Navigating the Hill

submitted by Olena Savytska

With only a few weeks left in the Spring Semester, freshman year is coming to a close. This year was a time to make new friends, to explore new fields of study, and to become more familiar with Suffolk. The academic year ahead will likely require more academic discipline, and even more advanced time management skills; former freshmen will need to start focusing on their major, and consider study-abroad opportunities. Yet sophomore year will not find students using a map to navigate the campus and longing to go home. As their first year in college comes to a close, freshmen realize that Suffolk *is* their home – the place where they will develop into successful citizens and discover exciting opportunities.

## Staying Connected Over the Summer

submitted by Vice-President Marguerite Dennis

Although another academic year is coming to an end, the work of retaining our students and keeping them connected to Suffolk will continue over the summer months. Beginning this May, a micro site will be available to first and second year students. Information of interest, upcoming events, etc. will be regularly posted throughout the summer. Students will also have an opportunity to communicate with classmates, faculty and staff via this new website. If you are interested in having information posted, please contact Susan Leyva, Director of Retention Services, at [sleyva@suffolk.edu](mailto:sleyva@suffolk.edu). Thank you for your help throughout the year and for your continued support of our students.

### Student Retention and Success Committee Members

Marguerite Dennis, Vice-President, Enrollment & International Programs  
 Walter Caffey, Assoc. Vice-President, Enrollment and Retention Mgt  
 Sebastian Royo, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
 Lauri Umansky, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
 Morris McInnes, Associate Dean, Sawyer Business School  
 Myra Lerman, Assistant Dean, Sawyer Business School  
 Christopher Giordano, Associate Dean of Students  
 John Silveria, Assistant Dean of Students  
 Michael Dickinson, Director, Ballotti Learning Center  
 Michael Duggan, Director of Enrollment Research and Planning  
 Mary Lally, Assist Dean Enroll & Retention Management/Registrar  
 Susan James Leyva, Director of Retention Services  
 Christine Perry, Assistant Dean Enrollment/Director of Financial Aid

## Save a Student Award

Linda Foley Vinay has been nominated for the Save a Student award by Vice-President Marguerite Dennis who writes:

In a soft-spoken and “motherly” way Linda Foley Vinay has helped to retain many students for whom English is not their first language. Linda has been instrumental in the lives of many Suffolk students and has patiently guided students from English language programs into degree programs.



When contacted about this award, Linda asked that her department actually be recognized for the award as they work as a team providing excellent service to all our students. Kudos to both Linda and the Second Language Services staff on a well deserved award!

*Please send your nominations for this award to Mary Lally at [mlally@suffolk.edu](mailto:mlally@suffolk.edu)*

# Help Your Advisees Learn to Revise Papers

submitted by Dr. Richard Miller,  
Director of Composition, Associate Professor, English Department

Below are 5 tips you can give your advisees on paper revisions:

1. Find out if the instructor will accept a revision: many will as long as he/she knows a student is planning to revise. The instructor may announce his or her revision policy in the course syllabus or the particular essay assignment sheet. If not, take the initiative and ask him or her.
2. If the instructor will accept a revision, let him or her know you desire to do one. And do it! Also be sure you know what form a revised paper should take for the course. Some instructors may want just revisions in pen or pencil on the marked draft; some may want a completely new copy—the answers may vary widely. The best idea is to visit the instructor during office hours and ask for some clarification and advice revising.
3. Complete the revision in a timely manner. Some instructors see revisions as extra work to grade, so be on top of the revision and turn it in while the assignment is still fresh in the instructor's and one's own mind. Turning in a revision in "out of the blue" or on the last day of class without prior approval may frustrate an instructor and not help either of you out in the long run.
4. Address specific concerns marked by the instructor. Plan revising around weak areas noted by the instructor, and consult with them if unclear about what to do. Some instructors may just want more editing or proofreading, while some may want substantial revision developing more main points or using more sources. If the instructor has marked up your original draft, make sure that you have addressed each thing he or she has marked to show you have followed their advice step by step. Attention to detail here can really pay off.
5. Get help! If meeting with the instructor is not enough, ask fellow classmates, advisors, as well as Writing Center tutors for assistance. Learning to write and revise is a collaborative process and help from peers, mentors, and professors, are all instrumental in improving a paper and one's grasp of the writing process.

## Financing College Education

submitted by Michael Duggan, Director, ERP

In the Spring 2008 Sophomore Survey conducted by Enrollment Research and Planning, sophomores were asked if they had any concerns about their ability to pay for college. 33% of the respondents in the 2008 survey reported they had "major" concerns, up from 25% in 2007. Finances can affect students' decision to stay at Suffolk or to transfer elsewhere. In the current economic climate we may lose more students due to financial problems.

