

Biology Department Advisement Plan 2011-2012

I. Overview

The Biology Department at Buffalo State has approximately 250 students enrolled in its baccalaureate (BA, BSEd, and biology minor) and post-baccalaureate (MA, MEd, certification-only) programs. There are 12 tenured or tenure track faculty members in Biology, of which two hold half-time appointments in the Great Lakes Center. All 12 participate in academic advisement. The Department Chair advises all MEd and certification-only students. Another faculty member serves as advisor for graduate students in the new comprehensive exam option of the MA program. The remaining faculty members participate in undergraduate advisement for the BA, BSEd and Biology minor. Additionally, all 12 faculty members regularly participate in academic advisement of MA thesis students by serving as thesis advisors or serving on thesis committees. The Biology Department is committed to providing advisement that includes program and college requirements, career counseling, personal support, and referral to appropriate campus offices and programs. At the undergraduate level, we will provide effective advisement through clearly stated student-advisor expectations, advisement presentations during freshmen and transfer student orientation, one-on-one preregistration advisement sessions for all students, a fall department open house to highlight programs and research opportunities, mandatory advisement for at-risk students, senior graduation checks, and continual training of faculty advisors. For graduate students, we will provide effective advisement through a *Graduate Student Handbook*, meetings each semester with academic advisors and regular thesis committee meetings. We track graduate student progress through the use of *Progress Forms*. Annual assessment of our advisement activities ensures that our advisement program is under a state of continual improvement.

II. Undergraduate Advisement

- **Expectations for students and advisors:** The Biology Department has developed a set of expectations for students and advisors. Copies of these expectations are available in the Biology office and are given to all new Biology students (majors and minors). Advisors are expected to understand program and college requirements, to use Degree Navigator software effectively, to be available to meet with students, to provide career counseling, and to provide personal support and/or referrals to college offices when appropriate. Students are expected to understand program and college requirements, to meet regularly with their advisors, to be prepared for advisement sessions, to use the college catalogue and Degree Navigator frequently to chart progress towards their degree, and ultimately to take full responsibility for knowing and fulfilling all degree requirements.
- **First Semester Freshmen:** Campus-wide FYWOW (First Year Week of Welcome) was initiated in Fall 2009. The Department restructured its new student information sessions to coincide with FYWOW, providing a large group information session to students and

parents. The Department also provides small-group, half day 'special topics' workshops to introduce new students to the array of faculty research, undergraduate research possibilities, courses, and facilities available.

- **Transfer Students:** Group advisement sessions (typically consisting of 5-20 students per session) for new transfer students occur throughout the summer and prior to the beginning of the spring semester. During each session, a Biology faculty advisor discusses program and college requirements, distributes degree guidelines, assists students in forming a class schedule for the upcoming semester, and answers any questions that students may have regarding requirements, procedures, career options, etc.
- **Newly-declared Biology students:** Current students who declare Biology as a major or minor are immediately assigned to a Biology advisor, given written program guidelines, and are encouraged to see their advisor as soon as possible to get assistance with course selection, program and college requirements, and career choices. They are also given the opportunity to speak with the Department Chairperson immediately if they have situations or questions that need to be addressed before an appointment with an advisor can be arranged.
- **Fall Department Open House:** The Department hosts an open house for all biology majors in October. The open house provides student with information about the three degree concentrations (Integrative Biology, Aquatic Biology and Biotechnology), undergraduate research opportunities and the biology club. Students can drop-in and visit informational tables to speak with faculty and senior level students about these programs. Attendance at the open house is promoted by direct emails to all biology majors and announcements made in all biology courses (majors and non-majors).
- **Department Advisement Newsletter:** The Department prepares an advisement oriented newsletter which is distributed in biology classes two weeks prior to registration. The Newsletter highlights student accomplishments and other department news. However, the focus of the newsletter is advisement. It informs students about biology electives for the coming semester, about undergraduate research opportunities and pre-health advisement issues. It also reminds students to prepare for their sessions with their academic advisor.
- **Regular Advisement Sessions:** The Biology Advisement Committee sets the date for the beginning of academic advisement each semester. Each adviser emails his/her assigned advisees using the BANNER email function. The email encourages students to participate in advisement and explains how to schedule an advisement session. During the meeting, the adviser documents the advisement session either using the paper *Advisement Record* or the Advisement Notes on degree navigator.
- **"At-risk" BA students:** The Department has a performance standards policy which requires that all biology BA majors maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA in biology courses taken at Buffalo State (BIO GPA). When students' BIO GPA fall below 2.0, they will be sent a letter informing them they are on departmental probation. The letter will indicate that the student has two semesters to improve his/her Bio GPA. Students who improve their

GPA within two semesters will receive a congratulatory letter from the Chair. Students who fail to raise their GPA at the end of the first semester will receive a letter indicating they have one final semester to raise their GPA. Students that fail to raise their BIO GPA by the end of the second semester will receive a letter informing them that they are required to leave the biology program and that they will not be allowed to enroll in further upper division biology courses. All Biology majors on Departmental probation are required to seek advisement prior to registration. To enforce mandatory advisement of at-risk students, the Department will assign each student on departmental probation an alternate PIN on BANNER. Students will be informed of the assigned PIN and will be told they will get their PIN from their advisors during the advisement session.

- **“At-risk BSEd” students:** Students are not admitted into the Biology BSEd programs unless they have earned at 2.75 GPA in biology courses taken at Buffalo State (a minimum of two courses). BSEd students whose Biology GPA falls below 2.75 are not allowed to take SED405 and not allowed to student teach. Warning letters are sent to all BSEd students with Biology GPA’s below 2.75 encouraging them to seek immediate academic advisement.
- **Senior graduation check:** Each semester, Biology advisors will receive a list of advisees who have completed 90 or more credits. Advisors will be asked to review each student’s record thoroughly and to assist the student in developing a plan to complete all program and college requirements in a timely and effective manner.

III. Graduate Advisement

- **Initial advisement:** As part of the admissions process, new students are given initial advisement by either their Major Professor (M.A. thesis students), the Department Chair (M.S. Ed. and post-baccalaureate certification-only students), or the advisor for MA comprehensive exam students.
- **Graduate Student Handbook:** All new graduate students receive a copy of the Biology Department’s *Graduate Student Handbook*. This handbook provides a detailed description of program requirements, expectations, and sample timelines for graduation.
- **Post-Baccalaureate Certification-Only students:** Certification-only students are strongly encouraged to meet with the Department Chair each semester for advisement.
- **Filing for Candidacy:** During advisement sessions, graduate students are encouraged to file for candidacy in a timely manner, and to submit appropriate paperwork if they change their approved plan of study.
- **Graduate Student Progress Forms:** Progress forms are maintained for each graduate student. These forms will be updated by students each spring semester. Advisors will review and discuss Progress Forms with advisees each semester. If a student is not making reasonable progress towards his or her degree, the Chairperson will meet with the student to develop a plan for successful completion of the program.
- **Graduation Check:** As a student approaches graduation, the academic advisor and the Department Chairperson will make every effort to ensure that requirements are being

met through the consistent use and review of the progress forms described above. However, it is ultimately the student's responsibility for meeting all program and college requirements.

IV. Other Advisement Procedures

- **Biology Advisement Committee:** The Department has a standing Advisement Committee composed of three faculty members. The Committee is responsible for helping the Chair implement the advisement plan, organizing the open house, orientation activities, advisement assessment and the biannual Department meetings devoted to advisement.
- **Department website:** The Biology Communications committee maintains the departmental website has degree guidelines available to help students understand program and college requirements, and information is also available regarding special opportunities for students such as internships, independent research, unique course offerings, and the Honors Program. A course rotation schedule is posted to help students plan course sequencing in future semesters. Contact information for all of the Biology advisors is listed. The Graduate Student Handbook is also available.
- **Assessment of Advisement:** The Department will assess undergraduate advisement activities. This assessment include collecting data on the number of students participating in advisement each semester, advisement questions on our *Senior Exit Survey*, as well as a review of written Advisement Records collected from faculty advisors. The Advisement Committee will continually try to improve departmental advisement through assessment, development of handouts for faculty and students, and training sessions for advisors. The Biology Graduate Committee is responsible for assessment of graduate student advisement.
- **Semi-Annual Advisement Department Meeting:** The Department holds a meeting each semester to discuss advisement issues. The Advisement Committee uses the meeting to coordinate advisement activities. Assessment results are discussed and proposals for improvement are considered. The committee informs the faculty about changes at the college level (i.e. general education) that impact advisement. It is also a chance for faculty to share their experiences with academic advisement.

Appendix

Undergraduate Advisement Materials

- Student-Advisor Expectations
- Informational Sheet on Biology Programs
- Descriptions of Biology BA and BSEd programs
 - Biology Bachelor of Arts Program
 - Biology Secondary Education (7-12)
 - Biology Secondary Education (7-12) with 5-6 Extension
- Biology minor handout
- Biology Performance Standards Handout
- Undergraduate Course Rotation
- Guidelines for Biology internships
- Undergraduate Research Opportunities in Biology
- Faculty advisor contact information and research interests
- Description of Biology Honors program
- Pre-Health Advisement Committee Information
- Undergraduate Advisement Letters
 - “welcome” letter
 - BA Performance Standards Probation letters
 - First Probation letter
 - Second Probation letter
 - Requirement to change program letter
 - Reminder to change program letter
 - Congratulatory letter
- BSEd “At-risk” letters
 - Low GPA letter
 - Congratulatory letter
- Sample newsletter

Graduate Advisement Materials

- Post-baccalaureate certification-only guidelines
- Graduate Student Handbook
- MA Program Supplemental Application
- MA Thesis Progress and Evaluation Form
- MA Comprehensive Exam Progress and Evaluation Form
- Graduate Assistant Evaluation forms