

SEVENTH ANNUAL

2018 *Star Family Prizes for Excellence in Advising*

ESTABLISHED BY JAMES A. STAR '83



Star Family Prizes for Excellence in Advising



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The Mission of Harvard College is:

To educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society. We do this through our commitment to the transformative power of a liberal arts and sciences education.

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 an honorarium. Each year, we ask them to tell us what they themselves think outstanding advising practice is.

Such practice can take many forms, as the words of this year's Star Prize winners attest.



ADVICE FROM ADVISEES



ADVISING FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

- Encourage your advisees to try new things and when they do, be their support system.
- Validate their feelings, even if you don't agree or see things from their perspective.
- Reassure your advisees -- of their worth, of the validity of their goals, of the validity of their concerns.

ADVISING A THESIS/GUIDING INDEPENDENT WORK

- Be receptive to undergraduates' ideas. Although undergraduates have limited experience in their fields that does not necessarily mean that their ideas are not interesting or valuable.
- Undergraduate advisers have the unique role of not only guiding a student's work, but also being able to empower an undergraduate's development as an independent thinker.
- Be understanding and flexible. Undergraduate students typically have much more on their plate than the research they are conducting, and there are also other valuable parts to a college experiences.



ADVISING ON THE CURRICULUM



- Instill the importance of a liberal arts education some students focus too narrowly on their concentration and view general education requirements as a burden.
- Be prepared with resources that will be useful for students when they are still exploring who they are as a student and academic. Knowing who someone can talk to, if not you, is endlessly helpful with so many options out there for each student.
- Have a good sense of what the undergraduate activities/culture is like, in order to provide resources/advice to advisees, encouraging them to participate in new things.
- Stay informed: keep up to date on changes in the College, whether that be in residential or academic life.
- Your advisees will have a diverse set of interests and opinions and will often turn to you as their primary source of advice. While you need not be an expert in every field and aspect of college life, being able to offer general recommendations or point them in the right direction will be refreshing and relieving for students.
- If you don't know much about the courses/academic work your undergraduates are asking advice on, connect them to someone who knows and can provide the guidance s/he is looking for.
- Coordinate with other advisers to support students so the support can be more cohesive and unified.
- Ask advisees for potential concentrations and then help them pick classes that are necessary prerequisites early on.
- Encourage undergraduates to take classes they are genuinely interested in, not what's popular.
- Understand the General Education program and be prepared to explain what the current and future requirements are. Even when the requirements or the timeline isn't clear, advisers should be able to help students navigate it.



PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE ADVISING



- Give advice outside of the academic realm. There are plenty of other factors that play into undergraduate life like the social scene, extracurricular activities, and emotional wellbeing.
- Ask open-ended questions like "how is the semester going?" to make students feel comfortable talking about themselves beyond academics.
- Question students' fundamental beliefs and play devil's advocate in advising conversations.
- Offer previous knowledge but not opinions.



PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE ADVISING



- Trust your advisees' ability to make their own judgments and to decide for themselves. Confidence is contagious.
- Remember that students are all in the process of learning about themselves, and that process involves constantly changing, trying new things, questioning decisions, and sometimes just feeling completely exhausted and lost.
- Work on actionable steps with them and help them stay on track.
- Encourage the student to follow their passions, but also seek balance.
- Challenge students on their stated paths and goals.



CREATING SPACES FOR GENUINE CONNECTIONS



- Be honest with your advisees and give them feedback even though it is something they probably may not want to hear.
- Let your advisee explain what he or she thinks is the right course of action, then provide feedback.
- Be sure to take a moment to acknowledge an accomplishment or recap an experience or milestone during the course of the student's project.
- Think about the whole student: many students at Harvard get so invested in a cause, a course, or a goal that they lose sight of other aspects of their life.
- Learn what makes your advisees happy.
- Advisers should be cognizant of particular facets of a student's background - for example, if they are first-generation, international, etc.
- Be enthusiastic and willing to understand exactly what undergraduates are going through and hope to achieve.
- Get to know them on a personal level: students will feel more comfortable asking you for academic advice if they feel like they know you personally. It will feel more like asking a friend for advice than asking an important academic or a much smarter adult, which can be intimidating.
- Be not only instructive, but also vulnerable. The most effective advising conversations are those that are two-sided.
- Active listening is a key skill, but it is also important that advisers be clear about their personal thoughts on a topic.
- Hear them out: even if you think their idea won't work, listen to their reasoning and take them seriously. Try to understand their perspective on a problem, whether it be what classes to take or what experiment to design.

CREATING SPACES FOR GENUINE CONNECTIONS

- Advisers should do their best to understand, at some basic level, common problems that their advisees may run into. Concerns with mental health, gender, and sexuality are common among students.
- It takes a certain level of trust to be able to have a discussion. To build this trust, you need to make the environment more comforting and welcoming.
- Most students want a comfortable space where they can share anything they feel the need to, so having a judgement-free zone plays a big role into how much the students are willing to open.
- Have empathy. Students should feel understood, as challenges can be very idiopathic and what might be easy for some may be incredibly difficult for others.
- Respect your advisees' boundaries/needs/areas of sensitivity.
- Check in on the mental health of your advisees, always. Mental health issues interplay in academic issues, etc.
- Following up on an issue, asking how the student is dealing with it actively or how they feel when it's over means a lot.
- Remain patient: in many cases, the advisers are our points of reference for academic decisions. Our choices may fluctuate, so remaining patient despite changes in student schedules/areas of interest.
- Be kind! Smiles can make stressful events feel much better.



Congratulations to All Winners!

Freshman Advising

Shawn Harriman

Amanda Morejon

Emily Warshaw

Sophomore Advising

Jessica Fei

Gabe Katsh

Kuong Ly

Faculty Advising

Ann Blair

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William Anderson

Katie Derzon

Bernhard Nickel

Freshman Advising



SHAWN HARRIMAN

Educational Program Coordinator in Mind/Brain/Behavior

I always try to help my students appreciate the big picture of their first-year experience, and celebration and calibration are key here. It is no small thing for each entering student to have a designated adult who cares about them and wants them to flourish here; who welcomes them to the Harvard community, is glad they are here, and reassures them that they deserve to be here; who helps them realize that the challenges they are facing are faced by everyone here; who cheers their progress; and who reminds them of this big picture of achievement when they are (necessarily) mired in the details of first-year life, activities, and courses. As I try to help students attend

to these details, I ask them about many aspects of their college experience. Although I focus on academic matters, I also believe that doing well academically can be easier for healthy, happy, balanced students. I thus talk with advisees about matters like study habits, eating and sleep schedules, extracurricular interests, and summer plans, and this helps me build up the big picture of progress and success I share with them repeatedly. I also share by example the skills of information gathering. No adviser knows everything about this incredibly vast and varied institution, but we learn how to find out what we need to know. Because assessing the information source is essential here, I am explicit with students about my own perspectives aka biases. For example, I tend to value minimizing stress. But I am always happy to advise contra my biases: our students can perform well (and some thrive) under the stress of ambitious programs, and of course we want to encourage such academic ambition. By sharing my own inclinations, I help students begin to think about their own preferences as they begin sifting through the information they are accumulating to craft their path through Harvard. The first year in college is such an exciting age, and with Harvard first-years it is an impressive moment as students move from accomplishment to accomplishment. To help them launch their adult lives is an exciting privilege!

AMANDA MOREJON

Proctor in Straus Hall

Advising relationships can take many forms. In my experience, it has been helpful to come into every advising relationship prepared and comfortable with the fact that you may not have all the answers. It is always more important to ask questions than trying to immediately problem solve. Sometimes the best solutions are the ones that have been before a student the whole time – they just needed the right mix of questions and support to realize it for themselves.



Freshman Advising



EMILY WARSHAW

Department Administrator for Theater, Dance and Media

Supporting students throughout the year has offered me some of the most rewarding experiences in my career. Support plays out in multiple ways; certainly by signing off on academic decisions, but also by going to students' events, performances, or making myself available to them when they may have needs that stretch beyond their academic pursuits. Any one of these instances gives me an opportunity to see my students in a new light, to get to know them on a level I couldn't have known had our interactions only taken place in an office with a desk and computer between us. I'm often left feeling inspired by my students. The paths they have taken to get to where

they are, the challenges they have faced, the talent they possess, the humility they embody, the kindness they share; these students teach me with every interaction we have, and my supporting them is just one way I can show them that I believe the work they are doing is important.

One of the key things I try to communicate to my advisees is that I *do not have all of the answers for them, but I will do everything* to help them navigate tough questions about their selected academic pursuits, and any other choices they may make during their first year on campus. I try to help them explore the multiple options available to them, and then help them take perspective on each possible scenario so they can make informed decisions. The adviser/advisee relationship goes two ways, and together we chart a course for their year, but it is important for the student's own learning that they understand they are the person steering the ship.

Though it may seem obvious, the best advice I could give to other advisers is to listen. Listen to what students are saying and to what they are not saying. Your students have most all of the information you need to advise them, any paying attention to that is crucial.

Sophomore Advising

GABE KATSH

Lecturer on Government; Teaching Assistant in Derek Bok Center; Sophomore Advising Coordinator and Resident Tutor in Currier House

It's a pleasure to work with Harvard students as they figure out how to pursue their intellectual and personal interests during college. Sophomore year can be a particularly challenging time as students acclimate to life in the Harvard houses and pick a concentration. When I was a Harvard undergraduate, I benefitted immensely from the advice of House tutors and concentration advisers; I'm glad to have the opportunity to pay it forward to the current generation of Harvard College students.



Sophomore Advising



KUONG LY

Resident Tutor in Currier House

Advising relationships can take many forms. In my experience, it has been helpful to come into every advising relationship prepared and comfortable with the fact that you may not have all the answers. It is always more important to ask questions than trying to immediately problem solve. Sometimes the best solutions are the ones that have been before a student the whole time—they just needed the right mix of questions and support to realize it for themselves.

JESSICA FEI

*Doctoral Candidate, Harvard Graduate School of Education
and Resident Tutor in Cabot House*

To me, successful advising relationships resemble strong partnerships: they offer students a sense of companionship through their personal and intellectual journeys, they are rooted in mutual trust and authentic care, and they aim to balance power in the process of working towards shared goals. As a sophomore adviser, I try to prioritize the wisdom of my students on what is best for their learning, growth, and overall well-being; I join them in their thinking, with the hope of supporting their self-knowledge and their self-determination. I want my students to know that they are fully capable of leading their own life stories. At the



Reflecting upon my advising experiences, I feel immensely grateful for the opportunities I have had to be a part of my students' lives, and for the possibilities for mutual transformation that have emerged from our connections. I am inspired every time I get to learn about what brings my students joy, what makes them want to shout, what makes them feel most fully alive. I encourage students to use these insights as a compass to guide them through their decision-making processes. As a fellow student, I highlight how this compass can orient us towards nurturing our whole selves through our time at Harvard. Importantly, the advising relationship allows us to practice the courage and honesty needed to act towards our own thriving, and to experience how freeing this can be.

Over the last three years, advising has meant shrieking my students' names at their performances, offering dumplings and listening as they reflect upon a hard day, diving into their art and their writing, sinking into the chairs of a café to talk about dreams and brainstorm plans. It has also meant understanding the ways in which our students—especially those who are minoritized—have felt unseen, unsafe, or disrespected in other relationships and spaces in their lives. Given these realities, I value the advising relationship as a chance to create a loving and humanizing space that affirms that all of our students matter, and that all of them belong. As advisers, we have unique power to bear witness to their gifts and shine light on their potential, here at Harvard and beyond.

Faculty Advising



ANN BLAIR

Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in History

A university is full of conversations—some are scheduled and follow a plan; others are fortuitous or completely surprising. Conversations that span differences of status or age are especially precious whenever and wherever they occur, and the pleasure of learning that results usually flows both ways.

I have myself benefitted from a lot of helpful advice from many quarters as a student and then as a teacher and I am delighted if others might find my advice helpful in turn. But I find that advice often operates at a distant remove from the moment in which it is shared, and it's often

hard to predict what bits will prove most relevant and memorable. So the solution is just to have conversations. In these conversations it helps to be self-aware. To realize for example that to be available to others one needs to be in a good place oneself (i.e. not too stressed or preoccupied) — I like to schedule conversations soon after teaching, when I'm not yet worried about preparing the next class. To remember also that the goal is not to persuade or lead the student to a particular outcome, but to help the student assess the many factors in a decision and devise their own method for reaching the decision that's best for them.

I especially enjoy connecting people with one another who have shared interests but might not otherwise cross paths, and sharing references as I come across them. Knowing about the interests of others makes me more attentive to what I encounter (in reading or in listening to talks for example), since I am alert for a broader range of topics than those I happen to be working on at the moment. I often keep track of things I'd like to share with others on an index card that I hope I can decipher and act on later.

Given that we all experience the challenge of managing information, I wish we would talk more often about our working methods and different ways of studying—in particular, in the field of history, ways of reading, note-taking, and writing. Advice from a librarian or a study skills professional, or a teacher or a student, can prove really valuable in clarifying one's study goals and in identifying the best ways to reach them by drawing on the many resources, digital and traditional, that we're lucky to have at Harvard.

Faculty Advising



EVELYN HU

Tarr-Coyne Professor of Applied Physics and of Electrical Engineering

Advising conversations are such a great joy for me, because they are insights into other sentiments, talents, worlds and possibilities. I don't have any magic formulas for "success" in advising. I try to "be there" for the student, wherever "there" is. I try to listen, truly listen, to learn, and sometimes reflect back the questions and concerns that aren't always couched in words. Anna Quindlen offered some wonderful advice in her 2000 commencement speech at Villanova. As part of her resume, she offered: "I show up, I listen, I try to laugh". Great guidelines to live or to advise by!

NICOLE NEWENDORP

Assistant Director of Studies for Juniors and Seniors and Lecturer on Social Studies

I love that I get to work so closely with students every day, and advising is a key part of that work. Mostly, advising is a way for me to try to get to know my students as well as possible, because through knowing them, I can be a more effective teacher and mentor. So, when I meet with students, I ask lots of questions—but I also try to listen well and learn something new from each conversation that I have. Of course, it takes time to get to know students, and no two advising relationships are exactly the same. While not every advising relationship works out as well as I would hope, it's the uniqueness inherent to the advising process that makes it so interesting, as the conversations I have with students constantly expose me to new questions, challenges, and ways of thinking about the world.



Concentration Advising



BERNHARD NICKEL

Professor of Philosophy

Before becoming a concentration adviser, I was and continue to be a Freshman adviser. That early experience shaped my approach to concentration advising. My primary job is of course to put our students in a position to succeed academically, but many aspects of a student's life that aren't narrowly academic influence that academic success.

For that reason, I think of my job as concentration adviser as supporting the students on their journey in whatever way they need at the moment, be that as a source of information, as collaborator in exploration, as mediator, or as advocate.



KATIE DERZON

*Sophomore Advising Coordinator, Leverett House;
Fellow for Undocumented Students and Teaching Fellow
in Sociology*

Harvard can be a daunting place. I have relied heavily on mentors and advisers throughout my collegiate and graduate school experiences, and I am privileged to play that role for current students.

Concentration Advising



WILLIAM ANDERSON

Associate Director of Education and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology

I believe a successful advising relationship is based on honesty and trust. A student should feel that they trust their adviser to look out for their best interests. In turn, an adviser should feel that they trust their advisee to be open with their hopes and concerns. Many students come to Harvard without an exact sense of what they want to do, and the many choices offered here can be very intimidating. They often fear they are going to make the wrong choice, and - that by taking one path - they will miss out on something that might be crucial to their future success on a path not taken. Students need to trust that your knowledge of them as not only a student but as

a multi-faceted person, and your experience with former students in their field of study, will result in you providing them with the best advice for how to accomplish their goals. Students appreciate and expect honesty about all aspects of their education, from the relative difficulty of courses to the rewards which come from spending the summer involved in intensive research. They require encouragement to challenge themselves, sincere congratulations when they succeed, and empathy when they struggle. By providing both academic and emotional support, you form a strong advising relationship which benefits both you and your students.

My advice for other advisers is to keep an open mind and really get to know your advisees. Find out your students' stories – where they are from, their aspirations for life at Harvard, what interests them outside of the classroom, etc. The students that come to Harvard are often spread very thin, and their home life, social life, and extra-curriculars both augment and pose extreme challenges in terms of their plans of study. It is very difficult to balance the many competing responsibilities that these students take on outside of class, so spending time learning about everything your students do helps you help them. Also, don't be afraid to put yourself out there as an adviser – it can be scary at times to share tough experiences from your own life but students will appreciate it. Just as you get to know them as people, they gain a deeper appreciation for your ability to advise them when they remember that you've gone through the same fires they have. Keeping an open mind about each student as an individual is crucial to tailoring your advice to their specific needs; their diversity is one of the most enriching aspects of the job.

Congratulations to All Nominees!

Anne Le Brun | Laura Amrein | **William Anderson** | Sarah Anoke | Ali Asani
Anna Babakhanyan | William Francis Barthelmy | Lauren Bauschard
Andrew Berry | **Ann Blair** | Hannah Callaway | Sarah Champlin-Scharff
Flora Z. Chan | **Tez Chantaruchirakorn** | Shomesh Chaudhuri | Christie Chiu
Gabe Cunningham | Diane E. Davis | Ziyun Deng | **Katie Derzon**
Louis Deslauriers | **Brandon N. Edwards** | Sheila Enamandram
Nadia Farjood | **Jessica Fei** | William Frost | Ruth Goldstein
Shawn Harriman | James Harris | **Evelyn Hu** | Sa-Kiera Hudson
Kate Johnsen | Roanne Kantor | **Gabe Katsh** | **Kasey Lange**
Horacio Larreguy | **Kuong Ly** | **Margaret A. Lynch** | Kerry Masteller
Richard McNally | Marcus Mello | Abigail Modaff | David Mooney
Amanda Morejon | Linsey Moyer | **Nicole Newendorp** | **Bernhard Nickel**
Vérène Parker | Shankar Ramkellawan | Mike Ranen | **Adam Sandel**
Margo Seltzer | Leah Somerville | Annie Spokes | Peter Stark
Victoria Tobolsky | Steven Torrisi | Shane Trujillo | **Emily Warshaw**
Duncan White | Wentao Xiong | Matthew Young

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

Names in **crimson are this year's winners

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 the transformative experience of Harvard undergraduates.



HARVARD COLLEGE
Advising Programs Office

ADVISING MATTERS

apo.college.harvard.edu