Coaching Conversations

The purpose of this document is to support faculty on how to engage in a coaching conversations to support students as they matriculate within the program. Coaching conversations will typically take place when there is a concern relative to a students professional behaviors that could impact successful matriculation through the program.

Conducting a Coaching Conversation

Phase 1: Identifying the Behavior

It is important that faculty are specific in describing the behavior. Data (if appropriate) should be used to support the identification of the problem (attendance logs, emails, etc.). The goal is to work with the student to understand that a problem exists. In this case, you to need to be explicit in the behavior while monitoring your interactive communication style and adjust your style based on verbal and nonverbal cues received from the student.

It is encouraged that the meeting is conducted in private. In some situations, it may be relevant to invite another colleague (Department Chair, University instructor) to support the dialogue.

The following prompts may help in the initial phase of the conversation:
- Address the specific behavior and connect to competencies outlined by CSWE regarding Professional Behavior:
  - "You have missed a total of 3 days. According to the syllabus…"
  - "I am concerned about your email response on September 5th. In response to my…you responded by saying…"
  - "I observed…(describe the behavior). What's your take on what happened?"
  - "I am concerned about the way you handled (or approached)…"
- Provide concrete examples (if this was not clear above):
  - "You missed class on September 5th, 12th, and 17th…I was notified on September 5th of your absence which is...According to the syllabus missing 3 days of class…"
- Illustrate why it's a problem: If relevant, you should discuss how this can impact their academic progress in class but equally important how this relates to the profession (refer back to the professional behaviors as much possible).
  - "Missing class can impact your ability to…"
  - "Let's review (professional behavior)…How do you think this relates to the profession?"

Phase 2: Actively Listen

In this phase, you should actively listen to probe why the above occurred. In this phase don't offer solutions but ask questions to get to the root of the issue. The following questions may help facilitate this step of the process.
- Why do you think (insert behavior) is important?
- Could expand upon that point (state the point) further?
- What caused you to react in that way?

Avoid exaggeration or statements that can pull the conversation in a different direction.

- "You always…"
- "You never…"
- "Every time…"
- "I have to always remind you to…"

Phase 3: Mutually Agree a Problem Exists and on an Appropriate Solution

In this phase it is important to transition the conversation to mutually agree upon actions to change the behavior. The following questions could drive the conversation.

- "Let's take some time to discuss alternatives to support your development."
- "What can you do differently moving forward?"
- "What is an alternative approach?"

At Phase 3 it is now appropriate to begin to complete the Concern Form (Level 1). At this phase the student should be clear about the behavior and what is expected.

Consequences

If submitting a Level 1 concern, it is essential that the student is aware of the consequences of their behavior. For example, if another concern is filed you will be elevated to Level 2, etc.

Follow-up and Reinforcement

The following phases are not necessarily required when submitting an initial concern (Level 1). It is suggested the following should be done informally and there is no need to document it on the Concern Form. In Level 2 (Departmental level), 3 (Unit level), and 4 (Dean's Level) it would be appropriate to document the below phases on the Action Plan Form (if appropriate).

Phase 4: Follow-up

To change behavior, it is important to consider points to follow-up with the student. When completing an initial concern (Level 1) this can be done informally at various periods. When discussing a concern at a high level (Level 2, 3, or 4), there will be a form that should be used to document the follow-up.

Phase 5: Reinforce
Because change is difficult, it is encouraged for faculty to reinforce any achievement. Positive reinforcement could happen randomly (which is more powerful especially if the student is not expecting it) or at designated follow-up periods. Reinforcement should include a positive comment regarding the performance of the student.

Adapted from Fournies, Ferdinand. Coaching for improved work performance. New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing, 2000.