



OGLETHORPE

UNIVERSITY

QEP Title: Compass: First-Year Academic Advising
Institution: Oglethorpe University
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The purpose of *Compass: First Year Academic Advising* is to improve the quality of advising for incoming first-year and transfer students. This enhancement will be accomplished in a number of ways, and we hope this new advising program will lead to increased student success by having Oglethorpe students engage earlier and in greater numbers with high impact practices.

Compass will revolutionize traditional advising for new students at Oglethorpe. Instead of our current system and process, which confines advising largely to selecting proper courses in order to complete the intended major, each student will now have a mentor who will guide him/her through the first year. Students will be encouraged, through this more intrusive advising model, to intentionally consider how what they do in and out of the classroom affects their lives after college. Oglethorpe admits a wide variety of students; some of them are more college-ready than others. We believe that all students, regardless of preparation, will benefit from holistic advising that pays attention to multiple variables that influence how our students discover success.

We will expect Oglethorpe's new *Compass* advisors to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of their students and to work with them throughout the first year to augment what they do well and to improve on areas of concern. Our experience teaches us that students make decisions and develop habits in their first six weeks that often lead them either to success or to failure at Oglethorpe. We also know that Oglethorpe students do not always ask for help until it is too late; our revised advising system is designed to actively work with students in order to assist them in developing smart habits. Some of our students will adapt just fine—even without intrusive advising—but even for them we believe that the *Compass* program can help excellent students make more out of their college education by encouraging them to plan early to study abroad, set up internships, consider an area of concentration, or strive for a leadership role on campus. By delaying when students are assigned an academic advisor in their intended field of study, we also imagine that students will have more freedom to explore other academic areas and find the right place for them in the curriculum—not necessarily the place they thought they wanted when entering.

Finally, we are confident that by providing uniform training based on best-practices to current faculty advisors and adding new professional staff to help in the advising process, we will make the best use of the right people to nurture first-year students. Many staff are well qualified to assist students in making good choices during their initial year and until now have been kept from advising. Research shows us that in today's world more contact with students earlier in their academic career helps students succeed. This is even more evident for first generation students and others who often face obstacles to success. We anticipate that our new advising program will bring students closer together with their assigned faculty or staff member and that, even after students have chosen a major and been assigned an academic advisor in their area, their original *Compass* advisor will continue to serve as a mentor.