

Communicating About Students

Tips for Writing Notes in Starfish and Degree Works

Starfish and *Degree Works* are designed to guide you in helping students succeed. By sharing course-related information about students, the barriers to academic success can be addressed in a timely manner and the proper support can be provided.

It is important to know that any notes written in Starfish and Degree Works become part of a student's educational record and are available to students.

The following suggestions are designed to help you write effective notes.

1) Use supporting facts; avoid generalizing:

Eg. "Student missed three classes and often arrives late." "Student dominates class discussions." "Student only handed in two of five essays."

Not: "Student is not college material." "Student is out of control." "Student is behind on his/her work."

2) Focus on behavior; avoid labeling:

Eg. "Student cries in class for no apparent reason." "Student smells like alcohol." "Student falls asleep during class which may be related to drug use."

Not: "Student is clearly mentally ill." "This student drinks." "I'm certain this student has a drug problem."

3) Use facts and describe behavior; avoid diagnosing students and using words that can be considered offensive:

Eg. "Despite tutoring, the student still has trouble understanding basic concepts." "She is unorganized and unprepared for class." "She seems sad in class and avoids me when class is over."

Not: "I'm certain this student has a learning disability." "Student is a mess." "Student clearly has emotional problems."

4) Keep the overall tone professional; avoid using Starfish and Degree Works to vent:

Eg. "This student needs to talk to an advisor about his commitment to college." "The student needs to learn how to accept critical feedback without getting defensive." "The student's behavior is disrupting the class and preventing me from teaching."

Not: "This is the worst student I have ever had." "The student needs to grow up." "I refuse to teach someone like this."

Please, do not use Starfish or Degree Works for emergency purposes. If there is a student emergency contact 911 and Campus Security (x 7001). For non-emergencies, please contact the appropriate office. For more information see the pdf booklet Fostering Student Health and Well-Being: A Guide for Faculty and Staff available on the Student Health Services webpage.