Communicating About Students

Tips for writing notes in Starfish and DegreeWorks

Starfish and DegreeWorks are both 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 DegreeWorks becomes a part of a student’s educational record and are available under FERPA. The following suggestions are designed to help write effective notes.

1) Use supporting facts; avoid generalizing: Describe the facts of the situation; be clear.

Phrasing something this way:
“Student has missed four classes and often arrives late.” “Student has only handed in 2 of 5 essays.”

Is more helpful than phrasing something this way:
“Student has no time management skills.” “Student is behind on his/her work.”

Avoid generalizations like:
“Student is not college material”

2) Focus on behavior;

Describe the student’s behavior with an example, such as:
“Student cries in class for no apparent reason.” “Student smells like alcohol.”

Avoid labeling the student, such as:
“Student is clearly mentally ill.” “This student has a drinking problem”

3) Be wary of “diagnosing the student”, such as:

“This student is depressed.”

4) Almost everything you write in Starfish is visible to the student, so it is best to keep the overall tone neutral

“This student needs to talk to an advisor about his/her commitment to college.”

Also, 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 contact the appropriate office. See the pdf booklet Fostering Student Health and Well-Being: A Guide for Faculty and Staff available on the Student Health Services webpage.