Guidelines to assist with “Return to Good Standing” Plans: Notes for staff

The Return to Good Standing Plan is designed to help students on Conditional status assess the issues affecting their studies and plan how to improve their grades. As part of this process they may seek further advice and support from designated staff in teaching and advisory areas.

To help you engage with these students we have compiled a list of possible questions to ask the student in order to better clarify the issues affecting their study. Following these there are suggestions as to how you can assist the student to finalise their Return to Good Standing Plan.

In engaging with a student on Conditional status it is important to emphasise that the period on Conditional status is an opportunity to improve academic results, and that we want to help the student succeed. At the same time it is also important that the student is aware of the possibility of Termination if results do not improve. However it is equally important not to frame this punitively as this may affect a student’s willingness to engage in this process.

Issues Affecting Study

- Review the student’s self-assessment. Have they fully explored all the issues affecting their academic results?
- Review the student’s results. To what extent does it appear the student has engaged with their studies? For example, a series of very low grades indicates a student barely engaged at all; whereas grades in the 40s indicate some effort was made.
- Explore potential issues with the student. Below are a series of suggested questions to help guide this conversation:
  - The most important thing is that you understand why your results are the way they are - Why do you think you failed these units?
  - Do you have other commitments (such as employment or family) that got in the way of study?
  - Were you passing this unit before the final exam? Did you find writing academic essays challenging? Do you feel comfortable using library databases for academic research? Do you know how to reference according to the rules? Did you study in advance for all your exams? Do you struggle with time management? Did you have trouble understanding the content of the unit? Are you studying the course that you really want to be studying?

Personal issues may well be implicated in a student’s academic performance – but it is necessary to be sensitive to a student’s privacy if they do not wish to disclose these. Below are two suggestions on how to approach this:

- It may help to frame personal issues if you list some possibilities such as health, disability, relationships, accommodation and financial issues to give an indication that the student is not the only person ever to have experienced these kinds of problems.
- Some students will respond to a direct question such as “Have there been difficulties in your personal life?” Others may respond better to a softer approach such as “How was this last semester for you personally?”
The Return to Good Standing Plan

- Review the student’s proposed plan of action – if they have not done so, seek to make the plan specific. Especially challenge vaguely worded or superficial statements such as “I will try harder”.
  - Focus on precisely what the student will do; which support services need to be accessed; and when these things will be done.
- Help the student to differentiate between Curtin-related issues and external issues and acknowledge that some issues may take longer than a single study period to resolve.
- Identify any perceived obstacles to engagement with academic staff, and assist students to approach lecturers or tutors if they are the most appropriate source of help.
- Identify any perceived obstacles to engagement with Curtin’s support services. If necessary, facilitate a meeting with the appropriate support services.
  - The Support Service Referral Chart provides a guide to what is available for a range of issues.
- Identify individuals who need a follow-up meeting to check on progress. If a student has consulted with a staff member about their plan, then this constitutes a documented intervention strategy. There must be an appropriate record of this intervention. A copy of the agreed plan should be retained by the teaching area on the student’s file

These guidelines were prepared by START staff Jim Elliott, Amanda Smith and Kate Gresham. Suggestions for improvement are welcome.

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