



Guidelines & Best Practices for Student Notes

The goal of Starfish is to document your interactions with students and share information with other colleagues who are working collaboratively to support student success. An important way to document student interactions in Starfish is through notes, both general notes and appointment notes. These assist you in remembering interactions and allow other authorized colleagues to be aware of interactions.

Creating Notes in Starfish

When making notes, please keep in mind the following details:

- Shared vs. Private Notes – Every note entered should be considered subject to review because of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which allows students to inspect their educational records upon request. This is true even if you select the Private Notes option. For this reason, all Starfish notes default to a “shared” notes setting and private notes should not be used. A good rule is to avoid writing anything you would not be comfortable with students, their parents, or potentially a third party reviewing.
- When creating a note, you can find which UNCW roles have permission to see it at the bottom of the “Create Note” screen.
- When saving your note, use a clear and memorable subject line so it is easy to sort and find later. If applicable, use your department’s pre-determined naming conventions.

Examples:

- 202010 TR INFO Last Name, First Name – Transfer Student Information Sheet
- 202010 ORI Last Name, First Name – Orientation Sheet
- Avoid copying and pasting email exchanges inside a note as this creates a long narrative that is difficult to review quickly. If you want to preserve an email exchange, please upload it as a document that attaches to the student’s folder.
 - Remember, these document uploads are subject to student review under FERPA and would be discoverable in litigation, so be clear and factual in the email chain.

General Guidelines for Notes

- **Observe FERPA guidelines** and remember that all notes or documents in Starfish may be reviewed by the student or discoverable in litigation. Further information on FERPA can be found online at: <https://uncw.edu/reg/records-ferpafaq.html>.
- Be factual and exclude opinions, including subjective judgments about motive or character, etc. Describe your interactions as if you were an observer.
- Don’t evaluate or diagnose a student. You may include quotes of something a student shared with you.
- Record concise, bulleted statements or summaries rather than long narratives.
- Enter notes immediately following a student interaction—letting time pass can mean a loss or inaccuracy in recording important details.
- Consult with supervisors and colleagues verbally when there is a question about what information to include. Feel free to contact the Office of General Counsel at 2-4027 with any questions or to request advice on how best to approach documentation.

Examples of What to EXCLUDE in Your Notes

- Exclude your subjective judgments about the student.
Don't write: *"Student isn't suited for UNCW and would be better off at a community college."*
BETTER: *"Student disclosed difficulty adjusting to campus life and stated it was more challenging than expected."*
Don't write: *"Student argued with me about missing the posted deadline and stormed out of the office."*
BETTER: *"Student appeared frustrated about missing the posted deadline and left my office before the end of the meeting."*
- Exclude personal concerns of the student.
Don't write: *"Student said it was difficult to succeed in class because of Professor X's poor English."*
BETTER: *"Student shared difficulty following the lecture in class. Referred student to learning support resources available on campus."*
- Exclude details about identity, disability status, physical or mental health conditions, or negative student comments about a colleague.
Don't write: *"Student was diagnosed with bi-polar disorder and is also pregnant. She is worried about passing her classes this semester."*
BETTER: *"Student shared personal history that may have future academic implications. Discussed counseling center support options with the student." Note, the student's medical condition may be relevant to provide to the Office of Dean of Students or Office of Disability Services.*

Examples of What to INCLUDE in Your Notes

- Include comments that help you in future interactions with the student.
"Student was well prepared for advising session and had tentative classes mapped out."
"Scheduled bi-weekly meetings to coach student on leading a fraternity."
- Include notes for how you helped the student.
"Reminded student to call the Dean's office to reschedule a missed dean's meeting."
- Include possible consequences of not following through on recommendations offered.
"Reviewed course sequencing for required courses. Student understands ability to enroll in course ABC will not be possible without XYZ prerequisite."
- Include notes that will help future staff understand the student or the advice that you gave.
"Talked through visiting home over the holidays and ways to cope with parent situation."
- Include referrals of a non-sensitive nature.
"Encouraged student to make an appointment with a career counselor."

A Note on Reporting a Student of Concern

The Office of the Dean of Students has a Student Behavioral Referral Form in MySeaport for faculty and staff to report students who share concerning information or behave in ways that necessitate outreach to the student. Be sure to report students of concern to the Case Manager so that appropriate interventions can take place. The report opens a wealth of resources to the student for their personal and academic support and allows the university to properly address any concerns.

Submitted reports should always include the student's name, 850 number and as much detail as possible. The reports go directly to the Case Manager and, unlike many flags and referrals in Starfish, the student is not aware of the report until an outreach occurs.

<https://uncw.edu/uc/train/documents/behavior.pdf>