Message from the New Chairperson

In the summer of 2016, we saw the first graduating cohort of the 4-year curriculum. These students, as it were, grew up with Academic Advising as part of their syllabus. I like to think that HKU’s special commitment to these students, and the generations of 4-year students that follow them, has paid off and is paying off: as we see our graduates go into the workforce or into postgraduate degrees, they reveal the very best of HKU and of the new curriculum. Here are young adults who have learned to navigate an often overwhelming and bewildering jungle of programmes, events, information and opportunities: there are curricular requirements, credits, experiential learning and study abroad opportunities, credit transfer, capstone experiences, extra-curricular activities…. The sheer enormity of things to know, to consider and, sometimes, to ignore and discard can be alienating – for first-year students especially but perhaps no less for final-years and even teachers. But our graduates have managed.

The Academic Advising system plays an important role in guiding our students through this academic jungle on the one hand – all the way from Year 1 to the final year – but, on the other, also let them create their own path and take responsibility for their choices. The growth of the individual is at the heart of the adviser-advisee relationship, and so are communication and the thinking through of implications that a particular academic step might have. No adviser-advisee relationship is the same as no university experience is the same (for students and teachers alike).

Good advising cannot do without the experience and goodwill of our many Faculty advisers: the jungle looks and feels slightly different every year and we need your help to make sure our students avoid traps and snake pits (or at least the ones you already know about). Advising is a collaborative effort between students, teachers and administrators. We have great colleagues in the Academic Advising Office and Faculty Offices who are always ready to support us. If we do our job properly – which I think we are, and I thank you all for your continued efforts – then we see happy and successful graduates we can be proud of: with independent thinking and good communication skills, the ability to follow a direction or change one, if necessary, and the knowledge that this complex world is easier to navigate in a team, our graduates are prepared to face the challenges ahead of them. Advising teaches essential transferrable skills which our graduates will, in time, use when they themselves become team leaders and advisers of some kind. So let them learn from us slightly more experienced expeditioners: let’s show our students what good advising looks like.

Dr. Julia Kuehn
Chairperson
Academic Advising Committee
Launched in 2012, the Academic Advising System has become central to the University’s vision of teaching and learning with close to 1000 academic colleagues serving over 4000 first-year students across all Faculties. Under the guidance of these Faculty Academic Advisers (FAA), students learn to take charge of their education by setting personal and academic goals, drawing up plans and making decisions towards realization of their aspirations.

In the “Join-the-Conversation” co-organized by AAO and CETL in December 2016, experienced FAAs – Dr. Michael Botelho (Faculty of Dentistry), Dr. Gary Harfitt (Faculty of Education), Dr. Julia Kuehn (Faculty of Arts), and Miss Nicole Tavares (Faculty of Education) – shared with the participants different approaches they used to guide students in navigating their studies to maximize their benefits from different learning opportunities at the University.

Indeed, there is a wide array of advising approaches that can be used to address the increasingly complex needs of students. In this issue, we would like to revisit this very fundamental issue: “What is good advising?” As there are two sides of the same coin, new and interesting perspectives might be drawn from the different vantage points of teachers and students.

### Teachers: Good Advising is To Guide, To Mentor, To Inspire and To Encourage

We emailed FAAs to gauge their views on “What is Good Advising” earlier this year. Here is a sample of FAAs’ thoughts and ideas about what qualities they think an academic adviser should have.

#### Advisers believe in mutual understanding and respect...

“Good advising is never a unidirectional dialogic communication, but it is indeed a mutual understanding, trust and respect, which allows both parties to work out together a feasible plan to try out for a better direction.”

Dr. Gary Wong
Faculty of Education

“Good advising is made of sensibility and experience. What I love about advising is the human encounter, whereby the advisee and the advisor share their perspectives and contribute to build a community based on mutual understanding and respect.”

Dr. Giulio Chiribella
Department of Computer Science

#### Advisers are torches of life...

“I would like to share a quote from Bernard Shaw ‘Life is no “brief candle”. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment (with good guidance and advice), and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before pass on to future generations.”

Miss Cecilia Ko
School of Nursing

#### Advisers think from advisees’ perspectives...

“Good advising means bringing to our advisees’ attention the important factors that they should consider when making decisions, as well as suggesting how they can proceed with their issues or gather more relevant information. Doing these effectively would require the advisors to gain confidence from the advisees and to think from the perspectives of the advisees.”

Dr. William M Y Cheung
Faculty of Science

#### Advisers inspire advisees to explore...

“An adviser is not only able to engage advisee in making decision on his/her study plan, but also to stimulate advisee in exploring new opportunities.”

A HKU Professor

#### Advisers encourage when things didn’t go right...

“Students paired with good advisers know that they can consult with such teachers when things are going well but more importantly when things are difficult and unpleasant. Good advisers are reliable, compassionate, and non-judgmental.”

Dr. Loretta Kim
School of Modern Languages and Cultures
**Students: Good Advising Means Individual Care and Personal Advice**

In the academic year 2014-2015, over 600 students sought advice from AAO in face-to-face meetings, covering a wide spectrum of academic issues, from adaptation to university life, major/minor selection to programme transfer. Moreover, from late February to early March 2016, AAO conducted a series of focus groups on 79 students with different backgrounds.

As AAO observes, for most students, good advising is a listening ear, an understanding heart and a non-judgmental attitude. They hope their academic adviser can:

* Give them solid study advice covering a wide spectrum of topics such as study skills, major/minor selection, exchange, etc;
* Be responsive and give them useful and timely advice;
* Give them individual attention through one-on-one meeting, instead of group meeting; and
* Act as a mentor who supports them in both academic pursuits and personal growth.

**Using a Developmental Approach to Advising**

From the above, it is quite obvious that teachers and students share a similar view on the definition of good advising. Among different schools of academic advising, the developmental approach provides an answer to the needs and expectations of both teachers and students. It encompasses a holistic perspective and emphasizes progressive stages throughout the student’s university experience. Grounded in cognitive development and psychosocial theories, Hurley (2007) offers 10 suggestions for the practical application of the developmental model when advising students:

1. **Get personal**
   Take time to get to know students as individuals before engaging in academic planning.

2. **Practice active listening**
   Encourage students to explain or clarify the reasoning behind academic decisions.

3. **Treat advising as an ongoing conversation**
   Take good notes and review them before each subsequent advising appointment.

4. **Avoid the temptation to decide**
   Advisers can help guide students through the decision making process, but should avoid making decisions for them.

5. **Make silence an ally**
   Allow for periods of silence in advising as the student processes new information or ponders how much to disclose.

6. **Challenge misconceptions**
   Students may sometimes arrive at decisions without adequate consideration of alternatives, and by challenging them to examine these decisions further, the advisers help them to make more deliberate choices and develop intellectually.

7. **Make students active partners in the advising process**
   Students should understand that advising is not simply a body of information to be imparted but an interactive process between adviser and advisee.

8. **Challenge and support**
   Students should be encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own academic planning with varying degrees of advising support over time.

9. **Make meaning of the curriculum**
   When students understand the reasoning behind degree requirements, they often become less resistant and more invested.

10. **Take a holistic approach**
    A student’s life beyond the classroom provides the context within which intellectual and academic development occurs, and by being aware of this context, advisers are better able to understand their advisees’ actions and to help them make sound academic decisions.

AAO wishes to thank every colleague who took the time to share her/his inspiring thoughts with us. As many teachers agree, apart from teaching and research, advising is an integral part of a teacher’s job. The value of advising in fact extends beyond study and advisers are making a life-time impact on students.

**Reference:**

**Further Reading:**
What's New with Academic Advising @ HKU

Front-loading First Year Students
To engage the freshmen early in their university studies, two initiatives were implemented this year to make academic information and advising support available well before the course enrolment period of Semester 1.

- University Registration and Academic Induction Day on August 11 and 12, 2016
  For the first time the 10 Faculties scheduled these academic events into different timeslots on the two designated days. Freshmen were introduced to the wide spectrum of university learning opportunities/resources including curriculum information, study options, Common Core courses and academic advising. They met with teachers/advisers and relevant administrative staff from the Faculty Office. Feedback from attendees was positive with an overall satisfaction rating of 3.74 on 5-point Likert Scale.

- New Sign-up Model for FAA
  To complement the Faculty induction, FAA assignment was put forward to mid August to provide timely advice to first-year students on course selection. Furthermore, a new sign-up model was piloted by the Faculties with major-minor options. Students of these Faculties (Arts, Business & Economics, Science, Social Sciences) were allowed to sign-up for their preferred FAA or a discipline of their choice via a system interface developed by AAO. The closer match between the adviser and advisee helped enhance the relevance of advice and motivate students to seek advice more proactively.

Common Core: Greater Flexibility in Course Selection
Being one important component of the HKU enabling curriculum, the Common Core has made changes to its course offerings which allow students more flexibility in planning their studies.

- Students may take two courses in the same AOI (Area of Interest) within one academic year starting from 2016-17.
- There are summer school classes and small private online courses (SPOC)

However, students should ensure that their Common Core course selection does not violate the requirement of not taking more than four courses within an academic year. Otherwise, their enrollment will be disapproved by the system automatically. For updated information and enrolment procedures, invite students to visit the Common Core website at http://commoncore.hku.hk/.

Horizons: Experiential Learning beyond Hong Kong
The University made a commitment in its Academic Development Proposal 2016-19 to provide “one Mainland and one international learning opportunity” for 50% of undergraduate students in 2019 and for 100% in 2022. Under the HKU Horizons framework, students will have more credit and non-credit bearing Mainland and overseas learning opportunities of diverse nature. These activities are broadly categorized as follows: 1. Exchange / Visiting; 2. Short-term Study / Study Trip; 3. Practical Experience; 4. Service Experience; 5. Research Internship; and 6. Student-initiated Mainland/ International Learning Activities. New programmes launched under HKU Horizons include “Nurturing Caring Leaders Programmes 2017” and “Common Purpose Leadership Development Programme 2017”.

When guiding advisees in drawing up their study plans, advisers may make reference to these opportunities at the HKU Horizons website (http://tl.hku.hk/horizons/).
Students’ Voices

Advising Helps Me Learn and Grow!

My adviser motivated me to follow my dreams...
I am studying Computer Science and wanted to pursue a second major in Finance so I needed help from someone to plan my course. I didn’t know who to ask since there are very few students who take such a combination, and after a point I was scared whether pursuing two majors would be a great burden. Thankfully, my Faculty Academic Adviser came to my rescue; he sat with me for a long time to discuss my plan and encouraged me to pursue what I wanted to do. We made a chart to personalize the courses for every semester because not every course is offered in every semester and some courses have pre-requisites. Finding all that information all on your own is a herculean task, who else would know so much about the various majors in HKU but a professional adviser?

After making my “Four Year Study Plan”, I was worried of going on exchange since it might interfere with the plan. So I sought advice from my adviser again; he motivated me to follow my dreams and at least apply for exchange. I got through an amazing university and now I am going on exchange for a semester and getting all my courses transferred, thanks to the encouragement of my adviser.

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He sparked off my devotion to pursue truth and knowledge...

I am a Science Year 2 student now. Here, I would like to share how my Faculty Academic Adviser helps me prepare for postgraduate studies and guide me to the way of self-learning. Since I have the hope of pursuing the study of neuroscience, my adviser kindly pointed out the need to further my study after the undergraduate programme. We reviewed the requirements, possible obstacles and future prospect of the field, just to ensure the goal suits both my ability and interest. What’s more, my adviser shed light on my passion towards various fields, which aided me in planning my study. He sparked off my devotion to pursue truth and knowledge, to think critically, and learn to learn. All these are important life lessons that are sure to be useful throughout my life.

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Aman Gupta | Year 3
Bachelor of Engineering

Alice Leung | Year 2
Bachelor of Science
From time to time, AAO receives questions related to student advising from FAAs. In each issue of our newsletter, we will select some cases for sharing possible approaches to guide advisees in resolving issues and attaining growth. If you have any questions or cases to share, please send them to advisingcorner@hku.hk.

**Difficulties with Studying and Other Interpersonal Problems**

*My advisee Tim is a MBBS student who is repeating year 1 due to unsatisfactory performance. Recently he told me that he had failed a few courses again this year. He had no interest in the subjects as he disliked memorizing information. He had skipped classes as he had rows with his fellow classmates, and later on found it hard to catch up. Now he wants to seek transfer to study Sociology in which he has greater interest. Frankly speaking I think Tim has personal and interpersonal issues, aside from study problems. What can I do to help him?*

**AAO suggests**

Tim seems to be an achiever who has suffered much frustration after entering university. His intention to seek transfer shows that he is motivated to study, though he apparently has not handled interpersonal conflicts and his study in a sensible way. It is good that he came to you for advice. You can review his study performance and at the same time draw support from other sources to help him resolve his own problems. Counsellors at CoPE CEDARS (Counselling and Personal Enrichment Unit) may help him learn more about himself and how to handle interpersonal relationships. To learn more about Sociology, we recommend that he seeks a Temporary Academic Adviser (TAA) from Sociology, which can be easily done via the SIS. Whether or not Tim decides to apply for programme transfer, AAO can guide him to work out a realistic study plan! He can make an online appointment on AAO website.
How Many is Too Many

My advisee Celia is a first-year student whose goal is to become a civil engineer. However she wants to minor in business subjects to prepare herself for both technical and commercial jobs. Besides, she is fond of dancing and serves as the President of the Dance Society, and participated in lots of competitions and functions. She also works as a private tutor to earn pocket money. She admits that she is not doing well in her studies, but she does not want to let go any opportunities to participate in the U life that she longs for. I guided her to list out the pros and cons of different options. But at the end of each meeting, she became tearful again and said she could not decide. I think our role is to help advisees take ownership of their decisions. What should I advise her?

AAO suggests

Celia’s problem is not uncommon. There are students who are so keen to explore university life that they take up more than they can handle. Students need to learn how to set priority and balance their academic and non-academic life. Engineering is a demanding study programme which makes having a minor a tough choice since extra credits will be required. Celia might consider taking business courses as free electives, or an MBA after she works for a few years. Regarding her difficulty to make decisions, it might be due to excessive pressure, a lack of skills, or a personality trait. You can refer her to CoPE for coaching from psychologist who could also help Celia improve her time management skill.
Advising Resources

To support the work of FAAs, AAO has produced different kinds of advising tools. They are easy to use, usually just a click away! In the coming year, AAO will continue to enhance our advising resources and provide professional development activities for sharing experience and good practices.

- **Quick Reference Guides for Faculty Academic Advisers**
  Comprehensive/concise versions of essential advising information and campus resources for FAA’s quick reference

- **Quick Web Link Guide for Advisers**
  Links to Faculty-specific information on a range of topics such as curriculum, major/minor, exchange, etc

- **Overview of Advising Tools**
  ([http://aao.hku.hk/faculty-staff/](http://aao.hku.hk/faculty-staff/))
  A one-stop shop of resources for advisers by AAO

- **Useful Contacts**
  ([http://aao.hku.hk/faculty-staff/resources/contacts/](http://aao.hku.hk/faculty-staff/resources/contacts/))
  Information of University offices/units for making referrals

- **Academic Planning Sheet**
  A year-by-year guide to help advisees draw up plans for their studies
What’s Happening?

“Meet and Chat” for Study Success for Direct Admission Year 3 Students
In view of the unique challenges faced by students admitted through the Direct Admissions Scheme (DAS) in studies and support network, AAO held a “Meet and Chat” session on August 3, 2016, which was attended by more than 100 DAS students across different programmes. Senior DAS students were invited to share their first-hand experience on how they learn, grow and get the most of their university studies. AAO offered tips on how they could navigate their studies more effectively and where they could get academic support and resources on campus.

The Essentials of Academic Advising @ HKU
To provide updates on academic advising and advising resources, a lunchtime workshop with participation of teachers across Faculties was held on September 28, 2016. A wide range of topics were covered, such as key features of the University Academic Advising System, the latest developments in academic advising, the advising tools in SIS and relevant campus support resources at HKU. Dr Anthony Tam from the Faculty of Engineering was also there to share his experience on how he helped his advisees cope with different study challenges.

Join-the-Conversation: How can academic advisors help students to capitalise upon the wealth of learning experiences at HKU?
Students nowadays are increasingly exposed to different kinds of learning experiences. To explore how to guide students more effectively in strategically planning for their studies, AAO co-organised with CETL a “Join-the-Conversation” workshop on December 1, 2016. Four panel speakers from Faculties of Dentistry, Education and Arts shared with the participants their stories in engaging, inspiring and guiding students to maximize their learning and development opportunities. There was also a fruitful exchange of ideas on how academic advising could develop in future to support student success.

Sept to Oct, 2016
Training Sessions for RSAs and FSAs of the Faculties of Business and Economics, Engineering and Law

Sept 13, 2016
Freshmen 101 Workshop: Be a SMART Learner - Work Hard Play Hard!

Sept 20, 2016
Briefing Sessions for Advisers of Faculties of Arts and Science

Oct 25, 2016
Workshop on Postgraduate Studies: Is Postgraduate Study Right for Me?

Aug to Sept, 2016
Training Sessions for Faculties of Arts and Science

Aug 13, 2016
Freshmen 101 Workshop: Be a SMART Learner - Work Hard Play Hard!

Aug, 2016
Facebook of AAO was launched! Like Us and Follow Our News
When ‘Major’ Meets ‘Minor’ Fair 2017

To provide an opportunity for students to explore different major and minor options available at the University, the Major-Minor Fair 2017 will be organized on January 19, 2017 (Thursday). Please share with your advisees about this and ask them to watch out for further details on our AAO website at http://aao.hku.hk.