

## **Academic Recovery Advising: Changes That Matter**

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*Roughly 40% of students who begin a college degree drop out before they finish (Causey et al., 2020). Some students decide the cost outweighs the benefits of a degree given their goals. Some value the degree, but have to work to fund it, and often that job takes priority. Others face struggles unrelated to finances, such as time management, social activities, and a lack of study skills. Many eventually find themselves on academic suspension due to low-grade point averages. The Academic Recovery Advising (ARA) program at Texas Tech University works exclusively with students who are returning from academic suspension or academic dismissal. This program facilitates student success through targeted, one-to-one advising that addresses academic, personal, and financial barriers and provides support to address those issues. The program begins working with students while those students are away from the university, creating a structure and relationship that forms the foundation of the advising partnership when the student re-enrolls.*

*Keywords: advising, academic suspension, academic recovery, retention*

### **A STORY**

Morgan (an amalgam of students, not a specific person) first arrived on campus for new student orientation. During activities, academic advising, and other events, Morgan met hundreds of students and made some pretty solid friends. They registered for the same classes, were in similar majors, and even were assigned to the same residence hall! Morgan moved on to campus in August ready for college – freedom, football games, tailgates, and everything else. Morgan bought textbooks and even “walked” the schedule created at orientation. A couple of classes were back-to-back and a fair distance apart in different buildings across campus, but, all-in-all, not so bad. No 8 a.m. classes, pretty balanced, with three classes on MWF and two on T/TR. Plenty of study time, too. It sure beats eight classes a day every day like high school!

About three weeks in, parties kept springing up, Rush was in full swing, and the football team was winning! Tailgates seemed to start on Fridays and last until Sunday. Money was tight, and so was all that study time. Morgan decided to pick up a part-time job as a server at a local restaurant. The tips were great! Hours were long, but they did not interfere with classes. They did, however, cut into that study time. By November, Morgan was still going to class...and then going to work or to the party of the day. Class time, yes. Study time, no. When grades were posted in December, Morgan had a 1.8 GPA and was placed on Academic Warning. Spring was a repeat of Fall, leading to Academic Probation. Morgan took the summer off and worked. When Fall came around, Morgan was still working long hours, re-taking classes that failed

in prior terms and losing motivation for school. By the end of the second fall semester, Morgan had been academically suspended due to his GPA.

We all have seen Morgan – in our classes, in our advising populations, in our offices. And we’ve seen every variation of Morgan: the Morgan who didn’t party but also didn’t know tutoring existed on campus – for free; the Morgan who was working 40+ hours a week to pay for school out of pocket; the Morgan who just let bad decisions pile up; the Morgan who became so overwhelmed that shutting down was the only response; the Morgan who wasn’t 18 and living on campus but was a 26 -year-old military veteran with a family to support. We have all searched for ways to help every Morgan we know and those we do not. At Texas Tech University, we have a few programs for students in academic trouble. One of those is our Academic Recovery Advising (ARA) program.

## **A RESPONSE**

The Academic Recovery Advising (ARA) program in University Advising at Texas Tech University works with students who are facing academic suspension or academic dismissal (academic dismissal is a second suspension for a longer period). The ARA program helps students identify the barriers they have faced on their academic journey. But, beyond identifying barriers, ARA professionals help students create strategies to overcome those roadblocks. Advisors work with students to help formulate success plans that are individualized to the student. Students meet with their assigned ARA advisor at least every four weeks, often every two weeks, to discuss progress, identify new short-term goals, and verify activities already in place to reach long-term goals. But what truly makes ARA in University Advising unique is that this one-to-one partnership with students begins BEFORE the student is readmitted to the university and continues until the student declares a major.

We created our Academic Recovery Advising program specifically to identify and collaborate with all “Morgans”. The interventions and plans created are as unique as the students and their situations. The process, however, is quite organized and specific. Our academic standing policy allows a student placed on Academic Suspension (AS) to return to classes after sitting out for one semester. Students on Academic Dismissal (AD) must leave campus for a calendar year (three semesters, including summer). Students on AS or AD must have dean-level permission to be readmitted, and different colleges have different requirements for that process. Some colleges want students to take classes at a community college before being readmitted; other colleges will not approve return to that college and require the student to meet with our office instead to be readmitted as a non-major. What students do DURING that time away from campus can make or break their academic careers. Community college is an option – and sometimes an excellent one. But not all courses are on the table. Contrary to what students tend to think, taking that failed ENGL 1301 class at a community college may cost them more – either in tuition or time to degree. The ARA program reaches out to students when they are assigned suspension or dismissal, and we stay in touch with them while they are away from campus.

## **HOW ARA WORKS**

Advising students at risk requires a blended advising approach. Drawing from years of research, both academic and practical, ARA includes prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising approaches. While prescriptive advising (Crookston, 1972) is advisor-driven and often dismissed as ineffective because of it, ARA students often need a checklist and a clear set of next steps defined by the advisor. Readmission, for example, is a process the advisor understands, but the student likely does not. It requires a to-do list from the advisor. Developmental advising (Gordon, 1994), as a shared responsibility approach, helps create an important relationship between student and advisor. Intrusive advising was described by Heisserer and Parette (1999) as a three-fold process: “intensive advising intervention with an at-risk student that is designed to (a) facilitate informed, responsible decision-making, (b) increase student motivation toward activities in his/her social/academic community, and (c) ensure the probability of the student’s academic

success” (p.74). This personal approach by Heisserer and Parette is a traditional way of making connections with students and certainly is effective in academic recovery advising.

The value of connections and positive advising relationships cannot be overstated. In an article written for *The Evollution*, adjunct instructor Sue Ohrablo, (2017) made this observation.

Academic advisors can play a critical role in promoting students’ success and, as a result, help to retain them. Students who feel connected to an institution, feel cared about, understand their purpose, and have clear academic and career goals are more apt to persist in their academic endeavors. Academic advisors can assist students in the areas of engagement, academic planning, decision making, and problem resolution.” (p.1).

The best solution for Academic Recovery Advising seemed simple—more advising appointments means more one-on-one time with students. Of course, there is much more to effective academic advising than scheduling multiple advising appointments per student every semester. Success comes from what happens in those multiple advising appointments. As reported in a 2017 study (Nutter, 2017), a scaffolding approach is necessary to facilitate academic success with at-risk students. This approach requires multiple interactions that discuss determination (grit), academic skill development, making changes to facilitate new results (growth mindset), and defining purpose (p. 82). The following information outlines a structured process that has been honed for the past eight years by professional ARA advisors who dedicated the time to better understand how to help suspension and dismissal students develop a plan of action for academic success.

### **Student Populations**

Academic suspension students and academic dismissal students are represented in one of three ARA advising populations. These distinctions are based on the student’s academic state at the beginning of the semester.

**Returning Students** are composed of those students whose academic standing is Academic Suspension or Academic Dismissal. Returning Students have not been enrolled at Texas Tech for at least one semester. Returning Students meet with an ARA advisor to complete the Conditions of Return (COR). The COR is reviewed by the Assistant Director and then sent to the Senior Director for Dean Approval. Upon approval, Returning Students agree to meet with their ARA advisor every two weeks to discuss academic progress. Academic Recovery advisors support returning students by helping them develop a strategy for academic success. Returning students implement a plan of action, allowing for a balanced schedule including classes, studying, work schedules, tutoring, supplemental instruction, and other academic support resources that should be a part of the student’s academic success plan.

**Continuing Students** are those academic recovery students who have completed the previous semester with a term 2.0 GPA or higher. Students will remain in the ARA program and be advised by an ARA advisor until obtaining a Texas Tech cumulative institutional GPA of 2.0 or higher and declare an academic major. Continuing ARA students will be able to register for full-time credit hours. Meeting with their ARA advisor regularly throughout the semester allows the students to continue building on the previous semester’s academic successes and receive the advising support of their current ARA Advisor.

**Pending Return Students** include those students who have been denied return to Texas Tech until they can improve their community college GPA to a 2.0 or higher. Pending Return Students who have not been denied may also choose to attend community college before returning to Texas Tech, but must also maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher. Pending Return Students will be contacted during the community college semester by an ARA advisor and encouraged to develop a plan for return to Texas Tech. The plan will include an initial meeting with an ARA advisor. The assigned ARA advisor will help students determine the best courses to register for while attending community college. Students are advised not to take grade replacement courses needing to be repeated at Texas Tech and are encouraged to make regular ARA appointments during the community college semester to report their academic progress. Upon successful completion of the community college semester, students will meet with an ARA advisor to discuss

Admission, Conditions of Return, and Dean Approval processes. After these processes, students may be readmitted to Texas Tech as returning students.

### **The Program/Plan-of-Action**

There are three distinct student success steps: Identifying Student Needs, Building Advisor/Student Rapport, and Student Behavior Modification. These steps focus on the need for a stronger academic advising relationship between ARA advisors and TTU students. This relationship is necessary to encourage students who may struggle with academic deficiencies, family problems, financial concerns, social connections, learning, and physical disabilities, or other reasons found to hinder a student's ability to be academically successful.

#### *Identifying Student Needs*

Of the three steps developed by ARA, the first step is most crucial to establishing communication and trust with academic recovery students, and that is to understand and identify the needs of the students. Identifying student needs is not an automatic process where students reveal every aspect of their successes and failures. However, by encouraging students to identify areas they feel have hampered their ability to be academically successful, advisors then have pertinent information that will help students develop a plan of action.

The plan of action begins with students completing the Academic Success Workbook (see appendix). Students are asked to complete the workbook before their appointment with their academic recovery advisor. The workbook addresses two specific lists for students to review—identifying Academic Obstacles and determining Academic Solutions. Students will often recognize areas of concern they did not previously consider to be an obstacle that has hindered their success. Academic Obstacles can be work-related, financial situations, poor study habits, fears, and other personal obstacles. The success workbook allows academic recovery advisors to help students review and determine solutions leading to positive academic outcomes. Academic Solutions could include academic tutoring or academic coaching, on-campus employment, meeting with Financial Aid, or scheduling an appointment with Student Counseling Services. Academic recovery advisors are not counselors and do not profess to be. Therefore, when determining academic solutions, ARA advisors refer students to individuals who work in the proper resources on campus, as necessary.

#### *Building Advisor/Student Rapport*

A recovery advisor must build a partnership with the recovery student so that accountability is established. This must be done over an extended period, which is the basis for students meeting with the recovery advisor multiple times during the returning semester.

Many academic recovery students have difficulty with personal issues. In these cases, a recovery advisor must clarify recovery students' busy schedules, which can include family obligations, single parenting issues, and those students who must be self-sufficient. Recovery students often cannot acquire student loans and must seek other options to pay for college. Therefore, working full-time becomes a necessity and not an option. Balancing these obligations with college can be difficult. Time management and real conversations about course load are key components of those initial meetings.

Other recovery student issues include PTSD, substance abuse, anxiety, ADHD, dyslexia, personal tragedies, and suicidal tendencies. Staying current with student issues during recovery appointments is an important part of monitoring their academic progress. Recovery advisors must help students coordinate a schedule that supports them in having a successful returning semester. Much of the time this means returning as a part-time student.

#### *Behavior Modification*

The main initiative for recovery advising is encouraging students to change their behavior. Time management, academic skill development, and assessing needs are major themes students discuss as academic obstacles. Grade point average must be the focus for the returning semester – a quantitative evaluation of qualitative behaviors; therefore, how a student's time is managed plays a significant role in

this process. If a recovery student identifies time management as an obstacle but is unwilling to change time management behavior, which includes study behavior, the outcome will likely not be different from previous semesters. Recovery Advisors must convey the importance of proper academic behavior and provide the necessary tools for academic success. Behavior changes must be a commitment by the students to do what is necessary, within their time constraints, to meet the demands of college-level coursework. To help students understand the importance of managing their time they must commit to a plan for success. This plan is unique to the student and based on developing or enhancing grit and a growth mindset.

To further support positive changes in academic behavior, students enroll in a 12-week academic strategy non-credit course often taught by the ARA advisor. This course meets three hours a week, providing instruction for proper time management, goal setting, self-efficacy, and study skills. Students are expected to apply these skills to their current semester courses. Additionally, students apply creative thinking, proactive decision-making, and effective communication to utilize in their other courses. Academic Recovery Advising (ARA) helps provide much of the academic strategies course material as well as teaching the course which is directed specifically toward students ARA advises. This course also allows the ARA advisor additional opportunity for connecting with suspension and dismissal students.

**Academic Recovery Student Responsibilities.** To be eligible for consideration to return to Texas Tech while on suspension or dismissal, students must show a willingness to adopt new and positive habits. By doing so students must also agree to the Conditions of Return (COR). Academic recovery advisors thoroughly review each of the conditions with students. The COR is then approved by the assistant director and sent to the Senior Director for Dean approval.

The Conditions of Return are the basis by which a plan of action is developed. This includes students registering for two-grade replacement courses with intention of improving their institutional GPA. Academic recovery students must meet with their advisor every two to three weeks to discuss academic progress and address questions or concerns. Students should also meet with their professors a minimum of twice a semester. During the COR discussion with their advisor, students also agree to utilize campus resources specific to their needs.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Students develop new ways of applying learned academic skills. This has a positive effect on study habits that lead to improved grades and higher GPAs. Students also improve time management skills by learning to balance personal life with the demands of college life. An important part of this process is for students to keep frequent appointments with their advisors and professors. Developing a plan for success and following through with that plan is an essential element that students learn. Most of all, students learn to be proactive, which culminates in the success of all other learning outcomes.

### **HOW WE KNOW IT WORKS**

In Fall of 2020, the institution enrolled 73 undergraduate students who had been on academic suspension or academic dismissal. Those 73 students were admitted into seven different colleges on campus. Academic Recovery in University Advising worked with 27 of those students, just under 37%. At the end of the term, all these students were retained at the university. Of the 27 in our population, nine students went from some form of suspension to good standing – in one semester! The results from Fall 2021 are also encouraging. The university readmitted 104 undergraduate students from suspension, 39 in our ARA program. We retained 61.5% of those students (n=24), and seven students improved their academic records enough to declare a major and take another step toward graduation. Our four-year data show an average of 72% retention for ARA students the semester they re-enroll.

Historically, fewer than one-half of one percent of the undergraduates at our institution face academic suspension each semester. However, we have noticed a spike in post-covid Fall 2021 which suggests that the number may be increasing. As Spring standing was posted just before submitting this paper, we can add our Spring 2022 data. As anticipated, overall suspension numbers have increased slightly, with 0.55% of undergraduates placed on academic suspension or academic dismissal following the end of Spring 2022.

We will be looking for trends and suggesting interventions as we analyze this trend more thoroughly in the months to come.

## CONCLUSION

The Academic Recovery Program in University Advising helps students turn academic struggles into academic success through a combination of personal accountability, holistic academic advising, and caring relationships. Students and advisors create plans that identify challenges and actions to overcome them, use strengths to enhance weaker areas, and engage in teamwork to support and celebrate success. For students who once thought their college career was over, ARA provides a reset and a new hope for academic success and graduation.

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## APPENDIX



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY  
University Advising

## ACADEMIC SUCCESS WORKBOOK

This workbook assists students who, for whatever reason, have found themselves on academic probation or academic suspension but want to return to good academic standing and continue their progress toward graduation.

As a student admitted to TTU, you have the academic potential to be an academically successful student. Using the steps outlined in this workbook, you will identify those obstacles that have limited your academic success and develop active solutions to return you to good academic standing. In a meeting with your college's Academic Associate Dean, you may further identify resources to facilitate your success, as well as discuss your continued development in your academic major.

What you decide to reveal as academic obstacles is completely voluntary; however, as much as legally and reasonably possible, whatever personal information you disclose in this process will be held in confidence.

Faculty members and advising staff are typically trained as academicians and advising professionals. They are not trained in counseling for disability, social, or emotional issues; however, they often assist students in identifying resources in these areas.

### Getting the Most From This Workbook

Your success in returning to academic Good Standing depends on the plan you develop for academic success. These steps can help systematically develop that plan.

- I. Open the workbook to page 2, *Academic Obstacles*. Check all the obstacles you think may apply to you. After reviewing the items checked, circle the four that seem to be the most significant obstacles.
- II. Fill in the My Academic Obstacles section found on page 4, under the heading “Academic Success Plan,” by listing the four academic obstacles that most interfere with your academic success. List the greatest obstacle on the first line. Review the list and be sure these are the ones that cause the greatest interference to your success. Revise your list if necessary; then, briefly write on the space provided how these obstacles have interfered with your academic success.
- III. Write the four obstacles you identified in the first column of Possible Solutions to My Obstacles on page 4.
- IV. Review the list of *Academic Solutions* found on page 3. Thoughtfully consider the listed solutions and check those you think may best resolve your academic obstacles.
- V. Refer again to the Possible Solutions to My Obstacles on page 4 and write the solutions you think will best resolve each of the obstacles.
- VI. Although you may have written up to sixteen solutions, identify with an asterisk (\*) those solutions you are willing to try immediately. Then, circle the one that would benefit you most for the particular obstacle.
- VII. List up to four solutions you are *willing to try* and which *will benefit you the most* in the first column of Balancing My Solution Choices. After some thought, write out not only how the solutions will help you but any challenges or additional problems they may create. Recognizing the challenges and considering how to meet them may go along with contributing to your academic success. When you are confident you have selected the solutions that will best help you **and** you are willing to try, move to the step VIII.
- VIII. In the final section of page 4, Achieving My Goals, write how you intend to achieve your solutions: What will be your actions, or what will you specifically do to implement the solutions? Be sure to include a deadline date for implementing these actions. Actions without dates tend to get lost.
- IX. Take this workbook and the *Academic Recovery Plan* to the faculty member you have been assigned to for review and discussion.

If you need assistance in completing the workbook or have questions about the process, please contact an advisor from University Advising in 347 Drane Hall or call 806-742-2189.



### ACADEMIC OBSTACLES

#### Free Time Obstacles

Too much social life  
Too overextended in my outside activities  
Too much TV

#### Financial Obstacles

Worried about money  
Financial aid requirements  
Inadequate financial aid  
Spouse not working  
Too many debts  
Time limit on school funds

#### Work-Related Obstacles

Work too many hours Problems with the boss  
May lose job  
Conflicts with the job  
No part-time work available  
Must work to survive

#### Obstacles Related to Major

Selecting a major  
Major-entry requirement GPA requirements  
Classes unavailable  
Major not offered  
Not happy with major  
Unclear educational goals

#### Academic/Study Skills Obstacles

Poor study habits  
Learning disability  
  
Poor time management  
Poor study environment  
Ineffective studying  
Inadequate study time  
Inferior academic preparation  
Inadequate reading skill  
Inadequate writing skill

#### Obstacles Related to Fear of Failure

Not being perfect  
Accomplishments Pressures  
Success Commitment Making decisions  
Making mistakes  
Difficult tasks

#### Personal Obstacles

New independent status  
Roommate problems  
Relationship worries/breakup  
Loneliness  
Socially uncomfortable/shy  
Housing problems  
Value conflicts Dislike TTU  
Demanding church calling  
Dislike college & studying High anxiety  
Previous failure Negative attitude  
Parental pressure Lack of sleep

#### Other Obstacles

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#### Sensitive Obstacles

If your academic obstacle is found among the following obstacles, mark the category heading but not the specific obstacle. You are strongly encouraged to seek services from professionals such as the University Counseling, University Career Services, Student Disability Services, the Student Wellness, your Physician, etc.

Anxiety or Stress Depression  
Divorce or Separation  
Emotional abuse Family health problems  
Family Issues/Concerns Health/Medical worry  
Illness or Death Learning disability  
Marriage or Relationship Issues  
Physical abuse Pregnancy Rape or assault  
Substance abuse or use



## ACADEMIC SOLUTIONS

### Free Time Solutions

- Set Goals
- Use a Planner
- Use To-Do List Daily
- Say 'NO' to Distractions
- Manage Time Better
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Financial Solutions

- See Financial Planner
- Consider Independent Study
- Contact Financial Aid (Loans/Grants)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

[www.finaid.advisor@ttu.edu](mailto:www.finaid.advisor@ttu.edu) for TTU  
Student Financial Aid

### Work-Related Solutions

- Reduced Work Hours
- Locate a job
- Position Change within Job
- See University Career Services
- If Possible don't Work
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Solutions Related to Major

- Career/Interest Assessment
- Internship Possibilities
- Career Counseling
- Computer-assisted Career Counseling
- Consider a Career Workshop
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### ONLINE CAREER ASSISTANCE:

[www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) for the Occupational Outlook Handbook  
[www.twc.texas.gov](http://www.twc.texas.gov) for Texas Workforce Commission  
[www.onetonline.org](http://www.onetonline.org) for O\*Net Interest Profiler  
[www.mynextmove.org](http://www.mynextmove.org) for My Next Move (Assessment)

### Study Skills Solutions

- Visit the Writing Center
- Acquire Tutoring
- Speak with Professors/Instructors
- Visit Academic Advisor Regularly
- Consider a Study Group
- Consider Changing Study

### Environment

- Visit Student Disabilities Services
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### SOAR LEARNING CENTER:

[www.depts.ttu.edu/soar/lc/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/soar/lc/) for Academic Tutoring  
Online Academic Tutoring Academic Coaching

### ACADEMIC LIFE COACHING:

[www.depts.ttu.edu/provost/success/coaching/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/provost/success/coaching/) for

Organization	Goal Setting
Accountability	Work Life Balance
Communicating	Handling Conflict Self
Confidence	Self Efficacy
Commitment	Social Engagement

### Solutions Related to Personal Issues

- Consider Personal Counseling
- Consider Group Counseling
- Acquire Problem Solving Skills
- Stress Management Help
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

### STUDENT COUNSELING CENTER:

[www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/) for Personal Counseling

### Family Concerns

OFFICE of the DEAN of STUDENTS:  
[www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/dos/) for Student and Family Concerns



My Academic Obstacles

Obstacle	How does this obstacle interfere with your academic success?
1	
2	
3	
4	

Possible Solutions to My Obstacles

Obstacle	Solution # 1	Solution # 2	Solution # 3	Solution # 4
1				
2				
3				
4				

Pick four of the solutions above you will try, then list and balance them below.

Balancing My Solution Choices

Solution to try	How Will This Solution Help Me? (i.e. Which obstacle will it confront?)	What Additional Problems May Result? (i.e. Will using it be worth the cost?)

Achieving My Goals

To achieve my goals, using the solutions I picked, I will do the following by:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_