

EARS Notes Guidelines

Introduction: Why Use EARS Notes?	1
How Do I Record EARS Notes? Considerations and Guidelines	2
Privacy and Confidentiality	2
Guidelines for Recording Sensitive Information	2
Reading EARS Notes Responsibly	3
Suggestions for Documenting Policy and/or Petition Information	3
What Do I Record in EARS Notes?	4
Suggested Format For EARS Notes	4
<i>Appendix A: Templates - Academic</i>	5
<i>Appendix B: Templates - Exploring University Experiences</i>	7
<i>Appendix C: Templates - Personal Challenges</i>	8
<i>Appendix D: Common Abbreviations and Acronyms</i>	9
<i>Appendix E: Recommendations for Reinstatement Petitions</i>	11
<i>Appendix F: Recommendations for Future Work</i>	12
<i>References</i>	13

Introduction: Why Use EARS Notes?

The Electronic Academic Records System (EARS) is an online tool that allows authorized UW advisers and staff access to student record information. Anyone with access to EARS can view and enter notes which are then retained on a student's permanent record in the Student Database (SDB). All advisers are encouraged to use EARS to document student meetings. Historically, however, this practice has not been universally adopted, nor have there been any available guidelines/recommendations for advisers on how to document notes on students. Additionally, there has not been common language on how to document sensitive student information. This document is designed to provide such guidance.

The use of EARS notes in advising practices can be a beneficial tool to help address some of the issues that students are facing, as well as keep updated information on file that is accessible to all advisers across campus for each individual student. Most importantly, these notes help ensure that the student is receiving necessary resources and is connected with at least one staff member/adviser on campus. The Office of Educational Assessment (OEA) conducted [a research study on UW Undergraduate Retention and Graduation](#) in 2006 and again in 2014. This study found that “[t]he fourth most-frequently given reason for leaving, noted by 17% of the respondents, was lack of support at UW. Many of these students said that they needed better, more helpful, or more personally-focused advising...”(31).

In 2017, a group of advisers from across the UW-Seattle campus came together in an EARS working group with an overall goal to provide a set of recommendations on what to include in advising notes based on common and challenging scenarios. The EARS working group has done research by pulling information from the advising literature and informational interviews with other universities and campus partners. We have also conducted our own research by surveying advisers at the University of Washington about what they want, need, and struggle with when writing student appointment notes on sensitive topics.

The overall consensus is that EARS notes are an important resource for advisers. Below are some key pieces of information an adviser may look for in EARS notes:

- Whether a student ever connected to an adviser
- Discussion with a student about major, back-up plans, interests, and goals
- Topics focused on misconduct, barriers, and problems or concerns mentioned by a student

Below are topics that advisers requested more information about when documenting notes after a student appointment:

- General standardization and expectations for writing notes in EARS
- Addressing confidentiality/privacy
- Creating specific language around documenting sensitive student topics

How Do I Record EARS Notes? Considerations and Guidelines

Visit this link to access UW EARS: www.washington.edu/students/ears

Privacy and Confidentiality

The University of Washington is committed to the privacy and confidentiality of student records. In order to comply with federal regulations the University of Washington abides by the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) which establishes students rights and the institution's responsibilities regarding the privacy of education records.

Generally speaking, [FERPA](#) allows the university to disclose education records or personally identifiable information from education records in the following circumstances: with the written consent of the student, if the disclosure meets one of the statutory exemptions, or if the disclosure is directory information and the student has not placed a hold on release of directory information.

Because the Electronic Academic Records System (EARS) provides access to student academic information, it is subject to FERPA. Under FERPA, users of EARS agree that they:

- Have a legitimate need to access student information in performance of their university duties; and
- Will not share, or otherwise permit access to, a student's information with others without written consent from the student.

In addition, users of EARS are encouraged to consider the sensitivity of information shared on this database as it will become part of the student's permanent record and become available to the student upon request. If the student has shared medical or mental health information with you and you believe its relevance to their academic success makes it important to record, record only the minimum information needed to document the discussion and/or action plans.

Guidelines for Recording Sensitive Information

- Always **consider the audience** for your note and **what is important** for them to know. You may decide that no sensitive information needs to be added to your note after all.
- Keep this part of the note **brief and factual**. Record enough information that serves as a reminder for when you meet with the student later on, as well as some general knowledge for the next adviser.
- Use **general language** if you can, instead of detailing specifics.
 - Student is dealing with family issues....
 - Student has had significant health issues....
 - Due to personal challenges, student was referred to _____ office.
 - Student is facing multiple personal challenges....
 - Student is experiencing difficulty with....
- If you must be specific, **report the student's words and behaviors** you've observed. Don't interpret or add personal comments.

- Student says that he is feeling....
- Student reports that she has been....
- Student tore the form into four pieces and raised his/her voice....
- Student came in to report a case of harassment....
- We recommend using the **student's preferred pronouns** or "the student" when referring to the student in EARS notes.
- If you're uncertain about documenting information shared by a student, or you're concerned about a student's welfare, consider consulting with the Registrar, SafeCampus, or Health & Wellness.

Reading EARS Notes Responsibly

When reading EARS notes, it is important to remain aware of possible biases - both the potential biases of the note writer and your own potential biases in interpreting those notes.

One approach that may be helpful in reducing bias is to read notes with a focus on the following 2 key pieces of information: **Subjective** information and **Objective** information (Weed 1964, Cameron and turtle-song 2002).

Subjective: Focus on the student's statements. What did the student say about what they are feeling, thinking, or experiencing?

Objective: Note which facts were observed by the note writer as opposed to those stated by the student. What did the student do? Are the notes written with behavioral observations to support the note or framed as a general impression?

Please note that we recommend exercising caution around allowing the content of EARS notes to influence policy, petition, employment, or admissions decisions.

Suggestions for Documenting Policy and/or Petition Information

Document discussions of university policies, academic regulations, and the status of important petitions. Documenting what you have discussed with a student about policy and/or petitions can help other advisers and offices better understand a student's current status in their administrative processes. It can also help university staff better collaborate and ensure that the student receives consistent information..

Policies to note include, but are not limited to:

- Exceptions granted for degree. Include why the exception was granted and on what basis.
- The status of any petitions that a student has submitted or plans to submit, such as the hardship withdrawal petition, returning student re-enrollment application, reinstatement petition, and graduation petition, among others.

- General discussions of ways in which university policy and academic regulations may affect the student.

What Do I Record in EARS Notes?

Suggested Format For EARS Notes

- **Reason for Visit:** Note generally why the student visited and the subject(s) you discussed.
- **Policies/Petitions/Procedures:** Note any policies, procedures, or petitions discussed with student.
- **Relevant Discussions/Conclusions:** Note important points from your discussion and/or if the student came to any relevant conclusions.
- **Next Steps/Referrals:** Note if you and the student made any plans going forward and/or if you made any referrals to other offices.

In the following pages, you will find recommended strategies for writing these notes according to the suggested topics above.

Top Five Things to Include

These are the top five things that we recommend advisers include in their EARS Notes, in order of importance if you are short on time:

1. Record that you met/connected with the student and the **reason for the contact**. If it was a phone or email connection, indicate this in the “Type of Visit” field.
2. Include **discussions** about specific majors/minors, including alternate plans, course recommendations, general interests, and student goals, etc.
3. Document **policies or procedures** that were discussed or resolved.
4. Include discussions about **barriers to success, issues, and concerns**.
5. Document **referrals** to campus departments or services.

Appendix A: Templates - Academic

Poor Grades

Class(es) affected:

Policy citation if applicable:

Reasons given for the challenge:

Brainstormed solutions:

Follow-up plan:

Disability Issues

Class(es) or Quarters affected:

Background:

[Disability Resources for Students](#) Notified/Involved? Y/N

Follow-up plan:

Discrimination Concerns

Class(es) affected:

Description of concern:

[Bias Incident Report](#) Submitted: Y/N

Follow-up plan:

Interpersonal challenges with faculty/TA

Class(es) affected:

Policy citation if applicable:

Description of concern:

Brainstormed solutions:

Follow-up plan:

Financial aid

Quarter(s) affected:

Policy citation if applicable:

Course plan noted in student's MyPlan: Y/N

Referrals to [Office of Merit Scholarships](#), outside grants/loans, departmental funding: Y/N

List if applicable:

Student Conduct

Class(es) affected:

Policy citation if applicable:

Issue/Alleged Violation:

Next Steps:

Resolved or Ongoing: R/O

Satisfactory Progress

Policy citation if applicable: [Low Scholarship vs. SPP165 Hold, for example]

Reasons given for the challenge:

Brainstormed solutions:

Follow-up plan:

Exceptions Requested/Granted/Denied

Background:

Exception requested:

Granted/Denied/Pending: Select One

Justification:

Petition Requested/Granted/Denied

Petition in question:

Background:

Granted/Denied/Pending: Select One

Justification:

Follow-up plan:

Appendix B: Templates - Exploring University Experiences

Program Planning

Student's interests/goals:

Expected graduation quarter:

Extracurricular opportunities discussed:

Anticipated challenges to completion:

Recommended next steps:

Follow-up plan:

Majors

Student's interests/goals:

Major(s) discussed:

Alternative option(s):

Recommended next steps:

Follow-up plan:

Study Abroad

Student's interests/goals:

Program(s) discussed:

Credit transfer course(s) if applicable:

Recommended next steps:

Follow-up plan:

Internships

Student's interests/goals:

Career fields/industries/roles identified:

Organization/Agency/Business(es) discussed:

Credit/No Credit: Select One

Recommended next steps:

Follow-up plan:

Major-Specific Opportunities

Major opportunity(ies) discussed: [Scholarships, research, Honors, exploration seminar, career prep, etc.]

Anticipated quarter/year for opportunity:

Recommended next steps:

Follow-up plan:

Appendix C: Templates - Personal Challenges

Personal challenges may include mental health concerns, family concerns, employment concerns, or identity development, among other things.

Template A

Student stated:

Asked student:

Appears ___ as evidenced by___

Referred to:

Template B

Student stated:

Resources provided or recommended:

Referred to:

Appendix D: Common Abbreviations and Acronyms

Note: While using standard abbreviations is recommended, this list is primarily provided to assist in reading EARS notes that contain abbreviations. The list is not intended to be exhaustive and the use of abbreviations/acronyms in EARS notes is optional.

A&S: College of Arts and Sciences.
Acad: Academic.
AoK: Areas of Knowledge.
AUT: Autumn.
BI Portal: Business Intelligence Portal.
C: Composition.
CC: Community college.
CEC: Course Evaluation Catalog.
CLUE: Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment.
CoEnv: College of the Environment.
CoM/COM: Change of major form.
CR/NC: Credit/no credit grading.
DARS: Degree Audit Reporting System.
DI: Drop-in appointment.
DIV: Diversity.
DRS: Disability Resources for Students.
EARS: Electronic Academic Records System.
EDW: Electronic Data Warehouse.
Elecs: Electives.
EOP: Educational Opportunity Program
EPRMJ: Extended pre-major.
FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
FIG: First-year interest group.
FinAid: Financial Aid.
FL: Foreign language.
FYP: First Year Programs.
GenEds: General education requirements.
GERs: General Education Requirements.
Grad App: Graduation application.
GSP: Graduating Senior Priority registration.
HW: Hardship Withdrawal.
I: Incomplete grade.
I&S: Individuals and Societies.
IC: Instructional Center.
Intl: International.
ISS: International Student Services Office.
IWP: Interdisciplinary Writing Program.

Letter of rec: Letter of recommendation.
LLC: Language Learning Center.
Non-matric: Non-matriculated student.
NW: Natural World.
OMA&D: Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity.
OWRC: Odegaard Writing and Research Center.
PCE: Professional and Continuing Education.
PME: Pre-major extension.
Postbac: Postbaccalaureate.
Pre-H: Pre-health.
Prereq: Prerequisite.
Qs: Questions.
QQ: "Quick Questions" - short, drop-in appointments.
Q/SR: Quantitative and Symbolic Reasoning.
Qtr: Quarter.
Reg: Registration.
Reg Hold: Registration hold.
RegOff: Registrar's Office.
Reqs: Requirements.
RS: Running Start
RSO: Registered Student Organization.
SatProg: Satisfactory Progress.
SAAS: Student Athlete Academic Services.
S/NS: Satisfactory/non-satisfactory grading.
SDB: Student Database.
SPR: Spring.
SUM: Summer.
TrIG: Transfer interest group.
TS: Time Schedule.
TT: Transfer Thursdays.
UAAA: Undergraduate Academic Affairs Advising.
UG: Undergraduate.
URP: Undergraduate Research Program.
VLPA: Visual, Literary, and Performing Arts.
W: Writing or withdrawal. For a withdrawal using the Annual Drop, will be recorded on transcript with the number of the week of the withdrawal (i.e., "W3").
WAG: Web Application for Graduation.
WIN: Winter.
W18: Winter Quarter 2018
X: Grade recorded on a student's transcript if no grade was submitted.
Yr: Year.

See also the Office of the University Registrar's list of [major abbreviations](#) and Undergraduate Academic Affairs Advising's list of [common terms](#).

Appendix E: Recommendations for Reinstatement Petitions

Adviser EARS notes are a very important part of a student's reinstatement petition. If you are working with a student who is applying for reinstatement, or are likely to do so in the future, please consider the following:

- Include as much information in the EARS notes about your conversations with the student as you can, while also being conscious of students' expectations of confidentiality.
- EARS notes help reinstatement committees understand student goals and assess their intent to improve scholastically. They show how advisers, departments, and/or faculty have interacted with the students. Additionally, EARS notes can potentially show considerations that have not otherwise been addressed by the student, but that are still valuable in making a decision about their return to the university.
- Advisers can endorse a student's reinstatement, explicitly withhold an endorsement, or remain neutral. We recommend that advisers make notes in a very general, observational, and factual manner that offers helpful insight (for example: "Student said they aren't attending class." "Showed student where to find resources about mental health on UW campus." "Student took notes about everything we discussed.").
- EARS notes about students having academic difficulties can lay the groundwork for other advisers or create guidance for meeting with this student in the future, even if the outcome is not reinstatement.
- If you feel uncomfortable including information about your discussions with the student in EARS, but you believe there is information that would be important for the committee to know, please write a separate letter to the committee and send it directly via email to hzurcher@uw.edu

Appendix F: Recommendations for Future Work

- Improve technical functionality
 - Access to aggregate data on notes
 - Improve format/interface to improve efficiency of note recording
 - Update check box options
 - Include student assigned advisor in EARS; not necessarily in notes
- Share/collaborate
 - Share with UWB and UWT campuses and request feedback
 - Share with local community colleges and other institutions seeking samples to guide their own work on standardizing advising notes
- Review which university positions on who should have access to EARS
- Incorporate this document into Adviser Basics training offered by Adviser Education Program
- Consider repercussions of EARS notes sharing between degree levels (i.e. undergraduate and graduate)
- Determine propriety of procedures that include EARS notes in decision (i.e. admission, employment, scholarships, etc.)

References

Beyer, Catharine; Angela Davis-Unger; Nana Lowell; Debbie McGhee; Jon Peterson. *UW Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Study*. University of Washington Office of Educational Assessment. June 2014. depts.washington.edu/assessmt/pdfs/reports/OEARReport1401.pdf

Cameron, Susan and imani turtle song. "Learning to Write Case Notes Using the SOAP Format." *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 80, 286-292. Summer 2002. faculty.coe.uh.edu/arbona/courses/PHLS7393/Readings/Case%20%20notes%20%20Cameron%2002.pdf

"Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) for Students." University of Washington Office of the University Registrar. registrar.washington.edu/students/ferpa

Seymour, Elaine & Hewitt, Nancy M. (1997). *Talking about leaving: Why undergraduates leave the sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Smith, Ashley A. (2018). Proactive advising leads to retention and graduation gains for colleges. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/13/proactive-advising-leads-retention-and-graduation-gains-colleges>

Strayhorn, Terrell L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging*. New York: Routledge.

Weed, L.L. "Medical records, patient care and medical education." *Irish Journal of Medical Education*, 6, 271-282. 1964.