

Intro to Your Future

New first-year seminar helps undeclared students find their niche

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(LEFT TO RIGHT) ANDREW CAO AND MALIK CARTER ARE WORKING ON FALL COURSE REGISTRATION WITH INSTRUCTOR JEN WASHKO IN THIS MEETING OF COLA 401.

When Jennifer Drohan '20 began her first semester at UNH last fall, she was ready to study anything and everything. The only problem, she says, was choosing one subject to focus on.

“I had an interest in every different area, from engineering all the way to English and then back to recreation management policy,” she says.

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The first year of college can be daunting, especially for students like Drohan who haven't declared a major. With a seemingly unlimited array of courses, majors, clubs, internships and other learning opportunities, it's easy for undeclared students to become overwhelmed quickly.

That's where the new course, COLA 401: Undeclared Advising Seminar, comes in. A collaboration between the College of Liberal Arts and the University Advising Center, the 1-credit credit/fail course gives undeclared students the chance to meet with their academic advisor once a week. Throughout the semester, students explore major and career options, develop planning skills and get to know the opportunities UNH has to offer them.

"It's a mutually beneficial course," says Nathan Talbot, director of academic advising. "It creates a sense of community for undeclared students. And for advisors, it allows us to reach all of our students and to be connected with them on a weekly basis."

COLA 401 enrolls 12 students in each class, which allows for ample one-on-one meetings between undeclared students and their advisors. The format of the class varies, according to Talbot. Some sessions focus on exploring major and career options, and researching internships. Other classes cover writing resumes, building time-management skills and developing a four-year academic plan. Guests from other university departments, like the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, make presentations.

The idea, Talbot says, is to get undeclared students familiar with UNH and set them on a path to success.

"For many of the students in their first semester, in COLA 401, we're taking a handful of their interests and helping them learn more about those majors and minors, and then

helping them get in to a position to pursue those interests,” he says.

For Drohan, COLA 401 helped her find a focus within her wide range of interests, both in and out of the classroom. The class helped encourage Drohan to declare a major in recreation management policy, and it helped her find her niche on campus. She joined the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega, got involved with uLEAD, a student organization that provides support for other student groups, and, this spring, joined the Campus Activities Board.

“COLA 401 helped me learn about these different organizations and offices at UNH — without it, I wouldn’t have been able to have those experiences,” she says.

Helping new students uncover that excitement is one of COLA 401’s primary goals, according to academic advisor Lydia Gove. Undeclared students are automatically enrolled in the course. By the end of the 15-week course, students are ready to select their courses for the next semester and start their academic journey.

“We want to have students be prepared for a successful four years at UNH and beyond,” she says. “We encourage them to go to events on campus, and our goal is to show them the breadth of



COLA 401 STUDENT KATIE BOYATSI WITH INSTRUCTOR LYDIA GOVE.

different programs — career events, internship programs, the study abroad fair.”

Like Drohan, Justin Missert '20 entered COLA 401 last fall as an undeclared student. He initially thought he'd major in business administration and minor in classics, but during the summer before he started classes, he began considering a dual major in history and economics.

“We covered a lot — how to build a résumé, how you should schedule your classes, general things I wouldn't have known about if I didn't take the course,” Missert says. COLA 401 gave him the tools to declare a dual major and plan his academic path.

It also helped him land a job. After a COLA 401 class on résumé writing, Missert was ready when a friend told him about a job opportunity. “Over winter break, I was able to get a marketing job because I had a polished résumé ready to hand to my employer,” he says.

Early feedback on COLA 401 is positive, according to Talbot. Students are enthusiastic about discovering academic opportunities and extracurricular activities they didn't previously know about. He's heard from parents, too, who are glad to know their students have a ready-made support network.

The enthusiasm is contagious. “The most fun part of the class for me is hearing the students get excited about opportunities and really thinking strategically about their time at UNH,” Gove says. “It's all about getting them more resources, options and opportunities.”

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