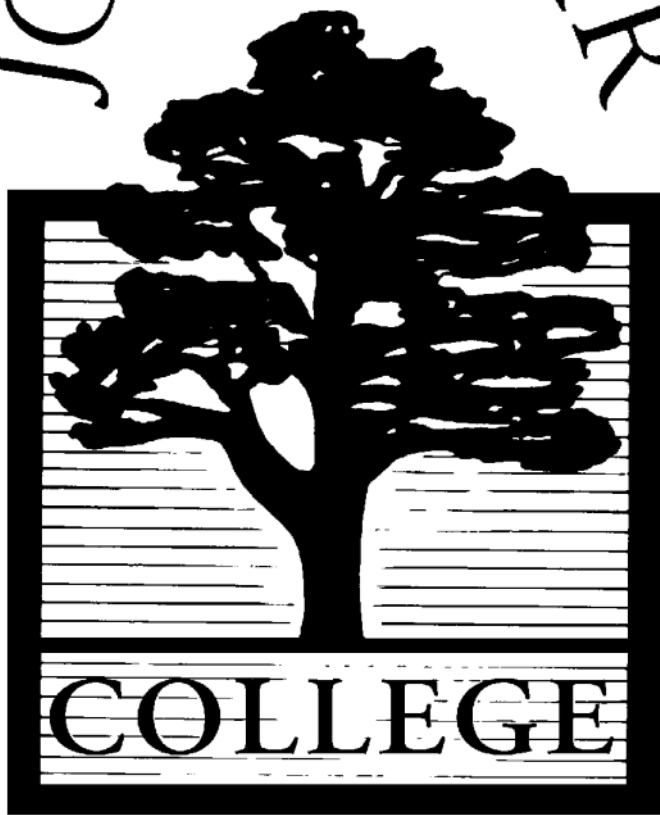


JOHN MUIR



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Supporting Muir Scholars

A guide for families of our Muir College students

You Are the Key to Student Success

Studies of why students stay in college and make it to graduation generally agree that family is usually essential to student success. The family that has raised and supported a child to the point that they are a young adult in college are the foundation of their sense of self, their communication styles, their values and work ethic, and their sense of belonging. Strangely, though, we structure colleges only around students as if they are totally independent of their parents, and often talk about students' ability to integrate into the college as if they are leaving home entirely and entering college as a separate life.

Nothing could be further than the truth. College is this weird shadow place where students have both a life independent from their families and a life connected to their family at the same time — where you as parents, step-parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other family members, are still in their lives. Especially in a world with video chats and long-distance included in phone plans. (I remember having to use a shared pay phone in the lobby of my residence hall and sending letters to my mother when I wasn't fluent at all in Japanese, and she was not very literate in English. Fun times) And for students, being connected to family is a good way to manage the stress and anxiety of the busy life of a college student.

The way I like to think of this is that even if I meet three times a quarter with a student every quarter for four years, I am going to spend 18 hours over four years with that student. And I will learn a lot about them. But that's nothing compared to the time you have spend, and what you know about your student. How can I compare? You are the expert, and your relationship is foundational to the person I need to help.

Remember that you have an important place at the table. I hope we can honor it sufficiently.

Confidentiality and Access to Records

Student records are covered by a number of laws, chief among them the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1970, also known as FERPA. FERPA requires that schools have to disclose most information about students to parents while they are in K-12 schooling, but once students enter college, the records “belong” to the student and **not** the parents, guardians, or family.

So what this means is that we **do not share grades or other academic records with families**. We don’t send report cards home and we won’t disclose grades over the phone or to parents without the student. That does not mean that you can’t get that information. But it will require you to work **with your student**.

- Your **student can sign a [release form](#)** waiving their right to privacy with specific people (like you), but we will still not share information on students without some process including your student. For example, you get to sit with your student during an advising meeting, but we aren’t going to do an academic plan for your student with you and without your student’s input.
- Your **student can send you regular reports** in PDF format from their academic history showing their grades and some day (the campus programmers in the Office of the Registrar swear), we hope to offer a way for students to give families direct access to their records.
- Your student can **give you their PID and password** to access their records.
- We can answer your **questions regarding policies, procedures, rules and regulations** without violating any rules. So we can’t tell you your student’s grades, but we can talk to you about what the policies are for academic probation, or repeating grades, or deadlines to drop a class, or resources for tutoring. None of that is confidential. But we will want to talk to your student along the way, too. We find that if students take the initiative to learn things, they stick better.

The **best way for you to have access to your student’s records** is to talk to your student. One of the things I deal with every quarter is students who are failing classes, and I find one very common theme... none of these students talk to their families until things are **really bad**. Why? Because almost all of them feel a huge pressure to be perfect, and an expectation that their struggles with grades are a disappointment to their families. And I find most families are not trying to put any such pressure on the students!

What can help is having discussions where you help students remember that you are proud of them and love them, that it’s okay to struggle and ask for help, and to make sure they know they can tell you even when things are bad without disappointing you. I know you already **feel** that way, but it sometimes still helps our students to **hear** it!

What UCSD Expects of Students...

There are unspoken assumptions built into our institution based on what our faculty, administrators, legislators, and legal counsel think students *should* be like. Much of that is wishful thinking, but it helps to know what is assumed so that you can advocate and support your students to the best of your ability.

Engagement

We assume students will be **active participants** in their education. They are going to do things, get involved in activities, and care about their work. They will be glad to take on hard coursework, and proud to do the work. They will not wait passively for professors to dispense learning. They will assume that doing more than the minimum is a positive way for students to build their intellect, wisdom, and work ethic.

Initiative and Independence

We assume students will be proactive. If they need help, they will need to seek it and not wait for someone to decide that for them. If they want a plan for the future, they need to start the process themselves and not have someone else hand them their future.

Integrity

Cheating in a place where producing academic work is our main value is seen as a huge problem. We assume that some parts of what is considered cheating in college are fuzzy and students need some room to grow, but we consider it a very problematic issue when students turn in others' work as their own and when students intentionally interfere with others' learning.

Responsibility

We give homework. Not just in classes. In advising sessions, we often give students next steps to follow up on. In student life, we give students options to join clubs. Our career center gives students steps to work on researching career or grad school options. Each interaction with a student is intended to give them something now and put some responsibility on them to take charge of their lives and next steps. When we do this right, we are scaffolding their learning about how to navigate life after college. When we do this wrong (sometimes because we overestimate students' preparation to take on responsibility), students get lost. Our hope is that if we have a relationship with students, those errors can be corrected over time and students encouraged to keep taking on responsibilities. Our ultimate goal is to build their ability to be leaders, to be reliable adults, and to be successful after college.

Even If This Isn't Developmentally Quite Appropriate

The problem with treating college students as fully responsible adults (because, you know, they are *legally*) is that most adolescents between say 13-25 are going through a lot of neurological changes that make the stuff on the page to the left more challenging. During adolescence, teens and young adults begin to develop the front of their brains, making pathways that connect part of the brain and develop the ability to regulate their thoughts and emotions.

Focused on Relationships

Adolescent development is marked by a huge focus on *relationships*. Not only romantically (but that is definitely part of it), but also in terms of friendships and group connections. There is a reason why your relationships in high school and college feel so deep and important — this is the period when those affiliations become a deep drive and *need* for belonging and connection.

Interested In Identity and Independence

Typical development for adolescents also tends to focus on a strong sense of self. This often takes the form of asserting independence, exploring and expressing one's identity (racial, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, religious and moral values), and trying to test the limits of old relationships with authority figures in order to assert themselves as adults. This upending may be shocking in college when they occur in students who have not engaged in such exploration *before* going to college — but it is *normal* developmentally.

Adolescent Brains Are Just Developing Abstract Thought

The growth of the forebrain in adolescence creates new connections between parts of the brain — and new ways of thinking along with it. Why do teens and early adults think they know everything or have just discovered something really deep? This is why. This means they may latch onto new ideas, challenge old ideas, and come up with new obsessions.

Adolescent Brains Are Just Finishing Up their Forebrains

The forebrain is the place where we develop things like a strong control over our emotions and our thoughts, the ability to understand consequences of our actions, and delay gratification. They will *probably* get better at it soon.

Adolescent Brains Need a Lot of Sleep

From their teens through their 20s, our brains need a lot more sleep, and getting up for an 8am class is hard. And remember how cranky they were when they were toddlers and didn't nap enough. Same thing now.

Requirements to Graduate

Students need to fulfill three kinds of requirements: University, College, and Major requirements.

University Requirements

1. Entry-level writing requirement

Prior to enrollment at UC San Diego, a student may meet the requirement with a qualifying SAT, ACT, AP, or IB test score, or a transferable college composition course. If students do not have a qualifying score or course, they must take a writing placement exam over the summer. Depending on their score, they may clear the requirement or be placed into coursework that they must complete with a grade of C or higher to complete the requirement.

2. American History and Institutions

A knowledge of American history and of the principles of American institutions under federal and state constitutions is required of all candidates for the bachelor's degree. Most students have completed this by having passed a high school unit in American History or a half unit in American History and a half unit in Civics or American Government. But a handful of students may need one approved course to clear this.

3. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Students should plan on needing to take one course to finish this requirement, though this can be planned so it also overlaps their major or college General Education requirements.

4. Unit Requirements

All students need to complete 180 cumulative units, at least 60 of which must be upper-division, which means they must be junior or senior level courses. This may mean a student will need some elective credits of their choice while finishing their degree.

5. Senior Residency

Students need an exception to graduate if they do not complete 35 of their last 45 units at UC San Diego.

6. Pass/No Pass grading

Only 1/4 of students UC San Diego units can be taken on a pass/no pass basis. They need to take 3/4 of their UCSD units for a letter grade!

College Requirements

1. Muir College Writing Requirement

Students need to take 2 college writing courses at UCSD. AP, IB, and com-

munity college courses are not allowed to replace these. Note that only one other UC San Diego college requires only 2 courses — most require more!

2. **General Education**

Muir students are expected to show a breadth of courses across several areas, but must choose their courses from loose “themes” that connect those general education requirements so they also have a some logic and theme to their education. Students must complete:

- 1 year of college coursework in math or natural sciences (intended to help with deductive reasoning and technical literacy)
- 1 year of college coursework in social sciences (intended to focus on inductive reasoning and understanding other people)
- Choose two of the three following options (intended to help students struggle with critical thinking, engaging with learning with no clear outcomes, and developing cultural literacy)
 - 1 year of college coursework in fine arts
 - 1 year of college coursework in humanities
 - 1 year of college coursework in a language other than English (language proficiency does not count toward this, though college credits from AP or IB exams may.)

3. **Overlap between major and GE**

Up to 3 courses from a student’s major may also be used toward General Education requirements.

Major Requirements

Since there are around 160 majors on campus, I am *not* going to list them all. A major requires at least twelve four-unit classes (48 units), but most require some lower-division requirements. They range from requiring only 48 units to requiring as many as 160 . All majors are required to include a plan which allows students to graduate in four years, and you can view a plan that includes all graduation requirements for any major at <http://plans.ucsd.edu>.

The Optional Stuff

1. **Double majors**

Students can do a double major, but there is a limited amount of overlap allowed between the junior and senior level courses in two majors, and some restrictions on what majors can be combined.

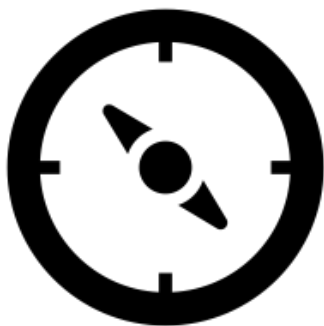
2. **Minors**

Students can have up to three minors, and there are limitations on overlaps between majors and minors. Minors appear on a transcript but not on a diploma and are sometimes a useful way for a student to show diverse academic interests, but are seldom a good reason to stay beyond 4 years!

Academic Advising is Here to Help



Muir supports current and former students. We do not provide advising to students who are prospective applicants or to non-Muir students. We can give prospective students some help, but mostly, we are going to end up having to send you back to Admissions because most of your questions really need to go back there!



Navigation

UC San Diego is a big campus with a complex bureaucracy and complicated requirements. Our most basic job in advising is to help students figure out how to navigate through the expectations, rules, regulations, and offices by helping students cut red tape, talk to the right people, and remove barriers to their education and post-college dreams.



Guidance

Between their college and their major advisors, students can get help planning the right courses, fitting in key co-curricular opportunities to prepare them for their future, and to fit everything together in a way that balances their grades and their progress so that they can get the most out of their experience.

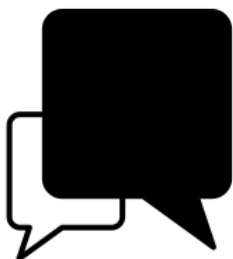


Empowerment

Advisors will push students to take responsibility for defining their own dreams and goals, taking responsibility or and learning from missteps, and growing in their sense of controlling their own futures!

Partnering with Us

I know I told you about the limits of what we can talk about with you in terms of student records vs. policies. But that does not mean we can't work together.



With the permission of your student, you can attend in person or zoom advising sessions. But do this with caution — I find that if parents have a lot of questions and the student does not, they are generally less likely to take steps they need to take on their own, and tend to be less willing to share. I find family members most helpful when students need help with a difficult situation where they need a lot of support.



Reaching out when you are worried about your student (they seem unhappy or struggling academically, personally, and emotionally), you can help us work with our colleagues in student affairs and residential life to provide your student with support, guidance, and wraparound care. We can use the combined powers of the college advising, residential life, and student affairs staff to work with your student.



When you are frustrated with the bureaucracy (you and me both!), or think you need someone to advocate for your student, you can reach out to us for advice on how to approach the challenges you are facing, whether or not there is a good solution, and who can help you. We don't always know everything, but we can still help you navigate our convoluted processes and structure.

While our main focus is on your student, we also understand that you are a key part of your student's support systems, whether we are talking about financial, emotional, moral, or personal support. And when we can serve you, that also serves your student! So reach out, and let us know if you need help helping your student!

Resources

Enrollment Information

- How to enroll in classes: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/undergraduate-enrollment/enroll-in-classes.html>
- How to wait-list a class: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/graduate-enrollment/waitlist-a-class.html>
- How to drop a class: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/undergraduate-enrollment/drop-a-class.html>
- How to change grading option or units: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/exams-grades-transcripts/grades/change-grading-undergrad.html>
- How to Withdraw from the quarter: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/withdrawal/undergraduates.html>
- Part - time study: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/special-enrollment/parttime-halftime-study/part-time-study.html>
- Enrollment & Registration Calendar: <http://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/courses/enrollment/calendars/index.html>

Policies and Procedures

- Grading system: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/exams-grades-transcripts/grades/about.html>
- How students check grades: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/exams-grades-transcripts/grades/check-your-grades.html>
- Incompletes: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/exams-grades-transcripts/grades/request-remove-incomplete.html>
- Academic Standing: <https://backontrack.ucsd.edu/>
- Repeating Courses: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/enroll/special-enrollment/how-to-repeat-a-class.html>
- Appealing a grade : <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/exams-grades-transcripts/grades/appeal-a-grade.html>
- Academic Regulations and Policies: <http://www.ucsd.edu/catalog/front/AcadRegu.html>

Majors and Minors

- Majors available at UC San Diego: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/undergraduate-majors.html>
- Capped majors: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/capped-majors.html>
- How to declare or change a major: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/>

[advising/majors-minors/declare-or-change-major.html](https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/declare-or-change-major.html)

- How to declare a double major: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/declare-double-major.html>
- Minors available at UC San Diego : <http://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/academic-info/majors/minor-codes.html>
- How to declare a minor: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/majors-minors/declare-minor.html>
- Major and Minor Department Advisors: <https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/resources/advisor-lists/departments.html>

Student Support

- Overview of Campus Resources for Academic Success: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/campus-resources/index.html>
- Tutoring and Study Programs by Department: <http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/advising/academic-success/tutoring-and-study-programs.html>
- Teaching & Learning Commons: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/>
- Office of Academic Support & Instructional Services (OASIS): http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/_organizations/oasis/index.html
- Jacobs School of Engineering IDEA Student Center: <https://jacobsschool.ucsd.edu/idea/>
- Support for first generation college students: <http://srs.ucsd.edu/support/first-gen.html>
- Support for student veterans: <https://svrc.ucsd.edu/>
- Support for students who are undocumented or who have undocumented loved ones: <https://uss.ucsd.edu/>
- Office for students with disabilities: <http://osd.ucsd.edu>
- Information for students who are parents: <https://parents.ucsd.edu/student-life/student-parents.html>
- Campus CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center: <https://care.ucsd.edu/>
- Conflict Resolution: <https://ombuds.ucsd.edu/>
- Legal support: <https://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/student-legal/>
- Campus Community Centers: <https://diversity.ucsd.edu/centers-resources/community-centers.html>
- Help for non- native English speakers: <https://students.ucsd.edu/academics/success/english-esl.html>
- Counseling and Psychological Services: <http://caps.ucsd.edu>

Muir College

Our website: <http://muir.ucsd.edu> ; advising phone number: 858-534-3580; advising email: muiradvising@ucsd.edu

