

Academic Advising for First Level Science Students at The University of Queensland

*Associate Professor Trevor G. Appleton, Assistant Director of Studies,
Faculty of Biological and Chemical Science, The University of Queensland*

One of the strengths of a Science degree at The University of Queensland is the very wide choice of subjects that are offered to students. The breadth of choice can also be a bewildering problem for incoming first level students, who often have only the fuzziest idea of where they want to go in their University study, or, if they have clear goals, of how to get there.

There are three main aspects of the program designed to assist these students:

1. The Course Guide

All students who are offered a place in one of the Science courses (Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Applied Science, Bachelor of Biotechnology, Bachelor of Environmental Science) are sent a *Course Guide* which includes a number of course plans (combinations of subjects leading to various fields of study - total 17 plans in 2000), details of general information sessions during January and February, an invitation to make an appointment with an academic adviser, and a tear-out form that the student is asked to bring to the advising interview.

2. The Academic Advising Interview

Students are asked to phone the office of the Faculty of Biological and Chemical Sciences to make an appointment for an academic advising session. A total of 54 academic staff volunteered for academic advising sessions, and were offered a choice of three times for a two-hour training session. Students usually come to the interview with some possibilities in mind from their reading of the *Course Guide*. Their career aspirations and subject choices are discussed, and the adviser attempts to answer any queries. At the end of the session, students take away a sheet of paper with recommended subjects written in by the adviser. The interview form filled out by the student and annotated by the adviser is kept by the Faculty for future reference. A total of 844 individual academic advising interviews were held over a 4-week period in early 2000.

3. Timetabling

First Level Chemistry and Biology subjects have enrolments between 1000 and 1300, and up to four lecture groups, with different timetables, are offered in each subject. Timetabling without assistance would be a daunting task. Each student who has enrolled in these subjects by the Tuesday preceding commencement of classes is provided with an individual computer-generated timetable.

This program does help students with the transition to university. The advice they receive minimises instances of students making unwise enrolment choices which limits future options or require them to spend time backtracking to reach their goals. Most importantly, however, it does provide a real human being who takes an interest in them, and who they can talk to. The faculty office is seen as a “student-friendly” place where they can return in the future if they need advice on academic matters. A smaller team of academic advisers are available for student appointments through the year.