



How to Refer a Student to the BSC

Faculty, teaching fellows and academic advisers are often the first to recognize when students are having difficulties in their academic life and learning. You might be alerted by a student's poor academic performance, by comments a student makes in class or in a paper, or by how a student seems to you in terms of that person's manner or behavior.

Consider referring a student to the BSC when you feel the student has learning difficulties that are beyond what you can address in your role as an instructor/adviser. You might feel that the student needs more help or a different kind of help than you can offer, or that you are running out of ideas or time. Connecting the student with resources at the BSC, while continuing to work with the student in your capacity as instructor or adviser, will create a network of collaborative support for the student.

Some signs of difficulty in academic life and learning

- poor study skills (reading, writing, note-making, etc.)
- failure to turn in assignments
- lack of participation in class discussions
- inability to keep up with the reading
- poor or falling grades
- missed classes
- falling asleep in class
- inconsistent performance in discussions vs papers vs exams
- emotional upset (tears, anger, expressions of frustration, etc.)
- complaints or concerns expressed by other students

Examples of student concerns

- "I can't seem to concentrate on my work."
- "Everyone here seems better prepared than I am."
- "I'm having trouble completing my problem sets."
- "I have so many commitments that I don't know how I can get it all done."
- "I have writer's block."
- "I thought I was good at school, but I'm not doing as well as I used to."
- "I am so far behind."
- "I thought I knew what I was doing here, but now I have no idea."
- "I've always tended to procrastinate, but somehow it's more of a problem now."

It is often difficult for a student to request or accept help, particularly when the student is feeling vulnerable or ashamed. Many Harvard students have never had to ask for help before; many assume that they must go it alone. Below are a few tips when assisting a student in getting help.

- ***Destigmatize the idea of asking for help.*** When you see a student struggling but the person seems reluctant to get help, you can express to the student that their experience is understandable, that you trust in the student's ability to address the situation and to find ways to improve, and that you believe the resources of the BSC will be helpful to the student. You can invite the student to look at the BSC website to learn about all the resources available to them. And you can assure the person that these services are widely used by students precisely because students find them helpful.
- ***Make your referral a personal one.*** If you know a particular BSC academic counselor, you could refer your student to that person by name or to a workshop or discussion group led by that academic counselor. Alternatively, you can invite the student to look over the list of staff biographies on our website to find an academic counselor who seems like a good match for their interests and concerns. If the student seems reluctant to call for an appointment, you might offer to call the BSC yourself, in the student's presence, to make an appointment; this sort of personal accompaniment often helps students take that first difficult step towards getting assistance.
- ***Make an email introduction.*** When referring a student to the BSC, it can be helpful to make an email introduction in which you email the student and a BSC academic counselor. Doing so with a student's knowledge and willingness is best so as to honor a student's sense of agency, authority, and privacy. For instance, you might write

Dear [Student] and [BSC Academic Counselor],

I'm introducing the two of you by email. [Student], as I had mentioned to you, I think you might find it helpful to have a conversation with [BSC Academic Counselor].

[BSC Academic Counselor], [Student] is a [first-year student/sophomore/junior/senior] in [Dorm/House], concentrating/potentially concentrating in [Department], and as we've been talking, he has let me know that he is finding himself without his usual motivation and gusto for his courses, and he has been rethinking some of his extracurricular involvements. Some difficulties in his family's circumstances are also weighing on him. We both think it might be helpful for him to talk things over with an academic counselor at the BSC, so I hope you two can find a time to meet and take stock of things together.

Or you might write

Dear [Student] and [BSC Academic Counselor],

I'm introducing the two of you by email. [Student], as I had mentioned to you, I think you might find it helpful to have a conversation with [BSC Academic Counselor].

[BSC Academic Counselor], [Student] is a [first-year student/sophomore/junior/senior/graduate student] who is taking my course, [name of course], this term, and, as we've been talking, she has let me know that, despite her spending an enormous amount of time on her coursework, she still feels out of her depth and not satisfied with her performance. She's also been wondering how what she is studying connects to the things she finds most meaningful and motivating in her life. We both think it might be helpful for her to talk things over with you and to explore her approaches to her life and learning.

If the student doesn't then email the BSC counselor to schedule an appointment, this email introduction allows the BSC professional to reach out to the student and invite that person to find a time to meet. While it's of course possible that a student could find an e-introduction

intrusive or micromanaging, our experience is that many students welcome a dean or instructor or adviser taking that first step on their behalf.

- ***Get to know the BSC.*** One of the best ways to help students connect with the BSC is to be knowledgeable yourself about our resources. Browse our website, attend a BSC event, or make an appointment to come in and visit with an academic counselor on staff to get to know more about our services. And please note that all teaching and advising staff are invited to take the Harvard Course in Reading and Study Strategies at no charge as a way to familiarize yourself with the course.
- ***Follow up with your student.*** After the student makes contact with the BSC, most students appreciate it if you follow up with them by asking how things went and whether the student's concerns were heard and addressed. Following up expresses your continued involvement and regard for the student's welfare. You can explain to the student that you are not asking the student to share with you any more than they are comfortable sharing, that you only want to be sure the student made a good connection.

If a student comes away from the BSC feeling disappointed or unheard, please encourage the student to talk with the BSC academic counselor about their experience and about what sort of support might be more helpful to them. If the student does not want to follow up with the same academic counselor, they are welcome to make an appointment with a different member of the BSC staff or with the Director.

- ***Consult with a BSC academic counselor yourself.*** And at any time during the process, you are invited to call the BSC yourself to discuss the situation or to consult about a referral for your particular student.

A whole-student, all-students approach

The Harvard student body is very diverse; students arrive with wide range of academic preparation, cultural values, and life experience. Once students are here, each new level of study and each new life phase presents them with new challenges. When students encounter difficulties, they might not initially know what the trouble is. It is often in the course of a conversation with a BSC academic counselor, or in a workshop or discussion group with fellow students that students can begin to define and address their particular concerns.

The BSC staff members welcome conversations about the wide range of interests, challenges, and dilemmas that students encounter in their intellectual and creative work and in their lives as students. BSC services are grounded in a whole-person approach that recognizes the connections among intellectual, social, and personal aspects of students' experience. Because all students can potentially benefit from the services the BSC provides, the office serves all students from eligible schools and programs (see "Eligibility," below).

BSC services include one-on-one academic counseling, the Harvard Course in Reading and Study Strategies, workshops and discussion groups, peer tutoring and ESL peer consultation, and self-help materials in the BSC's Cranium Corner and on the website. BSC services attend both to practical aspects of learning (developing strategies and skills) and to reflective practice (making meaning of one's experience as a learner, doer, maker, and whole person). Occasions for searching, sustained, substantive conversation about one's learning, growth, and development – whether in individual or group contexts – are at the core of the BSC's effort to help students make the most of their time in the University.

Eligibility

BSC program and services are provided to enrolled degree candidates in the following schools:

- Harvard College
- Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
- Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Harvard Kennedy School
- Harvard Extension School (by referral from the Extension School)

Privacy

BSC services are private, in keeping with FERPA and Harvard University policies. The BSC has carve-out status regarding Title IX, meaning that an academic counselors are not required to report Title IX-related incidents (regarding sexual assault/harassment/discrimination) to a Title IX Coordinator. Consult the Privacy Policy section on the BSC's website or speak with a BSC academic counselor about any questions you might have regarding privacy.

A Note about Emergencies

If you have concerns about a student's mental health or physical safety, contact:

- **Harvard University Health Services**
 - **Counseling and Mental Health Services (CAMHS):** 617-495-2042
 - **HUHS Urgent Care Center:** 617-495-5711
- **Harvard University Police:** 617-495-1212