Flagging Students and Writing Notes: A BlueStar FAQ and Guide

Flagging Students

What is a flag?

A BlueStar Flag is essentially an email from instructor to student that comments on the student's performance and/or behavior in class.

There are some positive flags, like "Good Work!" But most flags address negative performance—e.g., "Low Grades," "Attendance/Participation Concern," and "In "Danger of Failing." The flag's name serves as a subject line for the email, and your comments are your message to the student—i.e., your comments define the issue and offer suggestions on how to amend the problem.

After you send the flag to your student, it is saved in BlueStar and is visible to your student's assigned advisors.

Why flag a student?

There are many reasons. As mentioned above, a BlueStar flag is a message to your students about their performance and behavior in class. If you are the sort of instructor who emails a student when she is nearing violation of your attendance policy, an attendance flag can now serve as your warning instead. If you think a student deserves a bit of recognition for doing a great job during class discussion, you can give her a pat on the back in the form of a "Good Work!" flag.

Also, flags help some students avoid disaster. For instance:

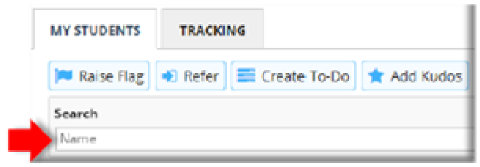
- At the start of each term, we are required by federal law to identify students who are not attending. A "Never Attended" flag calls advisors into action to ensure the student is not wasting his already awarded financial aid and to keep that student from garnering needless debt.
- Before the drop deadline, a student who is flagged for "Multiple Concerns" because she has only come to one class or missed the first quiz can make a more informed decision about whether to stay in the class or not.
- A student flagged as "In Danger of Failing" before the last day to withdraw has a clear impetus to withdraw and avoid failure.

How do I flag a student?

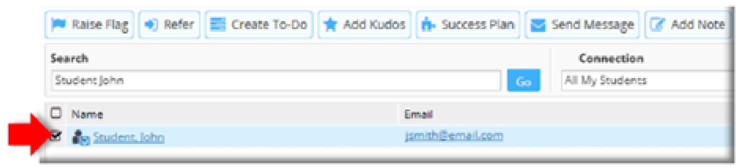
Faculty flag students two ways:

1. Twice during the term BlueStar@depaul.edu emails instructors to request they flag students via survey. BlueStar instructions on flagging students via survey are here. http://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Documents/bluestar-instructor-surveys-howto.pdf
2. At any time in the quarter, instructors can flag a student individually. Please refer to page 7 of the BlueStar Team's "Getting Started" manual on the BlueStar for Faculty page, or see the screenshot pasted below.

1. **Search for your student by typing their name or student ID number in the Search Name box.**



2. Once you have identified the student, **check the box next to the student's name and select the action that you want to take.** (Note: Your access to tracking items is limited to your role within BlueStar. Not all tracking items are available to all users.)



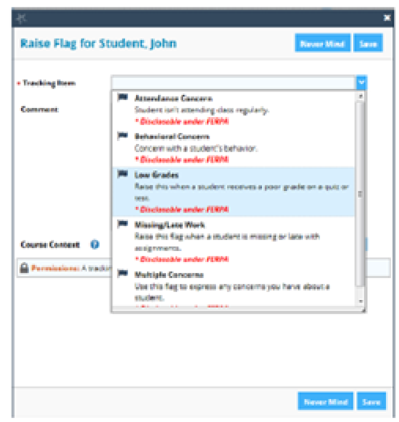
Raise Flag

Flags are used to report a concern about the student. Make sure that you read the specific reason associated with the flag before selecting an option. (Note: Some flags are intended for the student to see and the student will receive a notice as soon as you raise it.)

1. **Click on Raise Flag.** A list of flags that can be raised and viewed by you is displayed.

2. Select the appropriate flag, from the drop down list, and enter your comments in the **Comment** box.

3. Click **Save** to create the flag.



Why are there so many different types of flags?

If we stay with the email metaphor, a flag's title is akin to an email's subject line. The BlueStar team has 'pre-loaded' some specific subject lines that reflect likely student-success problems. Although the flag title informs a student as to why they were flagged, it is your comments and advice to the student that matter most.

Why do I need to write comments?

The comment is where you express your concern in full. You flag the student so she is aware of her behavior and its consequences. Your comments tell your student why you are concerned and what must happen next.

What an ideal comment should do:

1. Address the student personally:	By default these flags will contain sensitive info. It is more helpful to talk ***to*** your student than ***about*** him.	*Dear James:*
2. Define the concern:	Make sure your student knows why you are concerned / why you chose to flag him.	*You have violated our class's attendance policy, and you never turned in your Paper 2.*
3. State the consequence:	Stress the impact of your student's actions, and suggest what the student do next.	*Per our syllabus's policies on attendance and late work, you have failed this course. Please speak to your advisor right away.* *--Professor X*

Who sees my flag?

First and foremost, your student.

Always think of a BlueStar flag as a direct message to your student—i.e., flagged students are always sent an email or text message that includes your flag's comments. After you flag a student, the message is saved in BlueStar. At that point, it is visible to the student's assigned advisors.

Remember, students are a flag's primary audience; advisors are the secondary audience.

Why don't advisors respond to my flag?

BlueStar was first pitched to the college as advising software. And, it is a great tool for tracking advising meetings and keeping advising notes. Flags, however, often have much more to do with teaching than they do advising.

For example, let's say you flag a student for "Low Grades," and your comment tells the student that she's failed 2 quizzes, and her final grade will be docked by 15 points. There is nothing the advisor can add to this flag or comment—i.e., you've identified the problem and its consequence. However, advisors will bring such flags to the students' attention during their next advising meeting.

Although advisors can see all of your flags, there are only 3 flags that the university advising community will consistently respond to directly: "6 Flag Warning," "Multiple Concerns," and "In Danger of Failing."

What is so special about “6 Flag Warning,” “Multiple Concerns,” and “In Danger of Failing?”

- The “6 Flag Warning” pops up when a student has been flagged 6 or more times in BlueStar. Every time a student is flagged—including the flags advisors do not respond to automatically—those flags add up. Any student who earns more than 6 flags in a term is sent an automated flag by the BlueStar system. These students are obviously struggling personally or academically; and, the “6 Flags Warning” kicks advisors into action to provide the student with support, resources, and advice.

- Instructors use the “Multiple Concerns” flag when a student displays more than one *severe*, concerning behavior: *Is the student not attending class? Has the student stopped submitting work? Is the student failing every quiz? Are you worried about the student on a personal level?* This flag and its comments let the student know why you are concerned, but they also offer the advisor an insight or a narrative re. how to best assist the student.

- Instructors use the “In Danger of Failing” flag when the student displays behaviors that are sure to lead to failure and/or when it is impossible for the student to pass the class. Depending on what time in the quarter the flag is issued, advisors intercede and encourage the student to drop, withdraw, or seek the assistance of the Dean of Students Office (…for late withdrawal and other options).

What happens after the advisor reaches out to the student?

It is up to the student to follow up on the matter. If a student is not responding to the outreach made by the instructor or advisor, the advisor may request assistance from the Dean of Students Office.

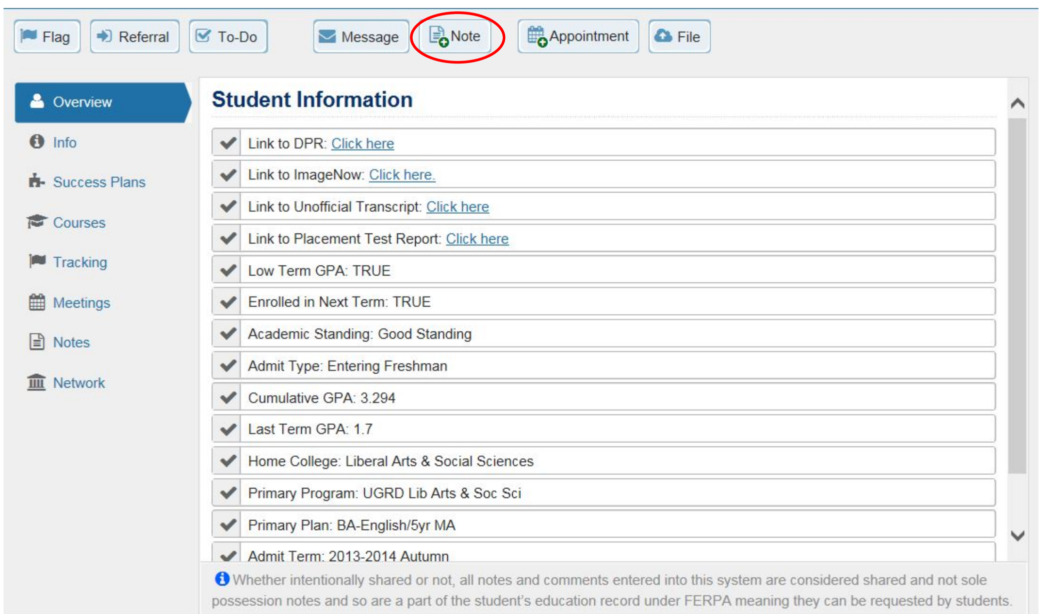
Writing Notes

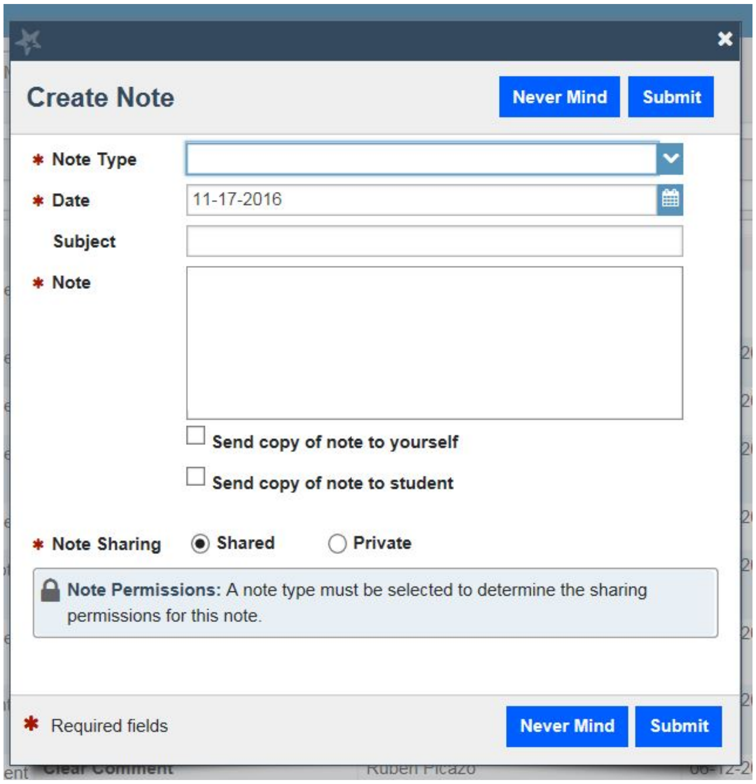
What is a note?

A Blue Star note is a way for faculty and staff to document interactions with a student. BlueStar offers a number of note categories to choose from; we recommend choosing “General Note” when documenting impromptu advising moments.

For example, a student may email you to ask about a specific requirement for the major or your course. You would like to document the email correspondence so that there is a record of the information provided. A note is appropriate here.

Notes should not be entered for a face-to-face advising appointment; in these cases, we recommend using Appointment Outcomes (see below). Notes are intended to be supplemental to appointment outcomes.





What is an appointment outcome?

When you meet with a student during a scheduled appointment, or through office hours, or when you enter a walk-in appointment into BlueStar, we suggest your record that advising interaction as an ***Appointment Outcome*** (i.e., BlueStar notes specifically attached to an advising meeting).

An appointment outcome is similar to a note, in that you are entering a summary of your discussion with your advisee. However, appointment outcomes can be "tagged" in way that allows advisors to search for specific types of advising meetings and information. (See the attached "How To" instructions for Appointment Outcomes).

As with notes and flags, there are people granted certain roles within Blue Star who can view these appointment outcomes.

Who can see my note or outcome?

Almost all notes can be viewed by the student's assigned advisors. Most notes and outcome comments are also available for the student to view in BlueStar.

Some staff—like academic advisors, Dean of Students personnel, counselors in the Center for Students with Disabilities, etc.—are allowed to see all shared notes and outcomes entered in

Blue Star. Other BlueStar users are limited to what they see. When you select "General Note," you will see the BlueStar roles who can access the note.

If you do not want to share your note and would prefer that the note remain private, there is a privacy option that can be selected. However, please remember that ***all student records can be subpoenaed***. As a good practice, you should keep your note concise and factual.

Why are notes and outcomes important?

Good notes verify information, provide a consistent message to the student, and hold students accountable. Notes & outcomes record key information related to enrollment, graduation, academic performance, requirements, etc.

Your notes assist in piecing together the students' academic puzzle. Students may see several different people on campus for "advice," and it is helpful for every advisor to know something of the discussion that occurred during each of those previous interactions. Notes and outcomes are important to advisors, student service offices, and faculty advisors, so that we support previous advisors' insights—or, so we best explain why we might offer conflicting advice.

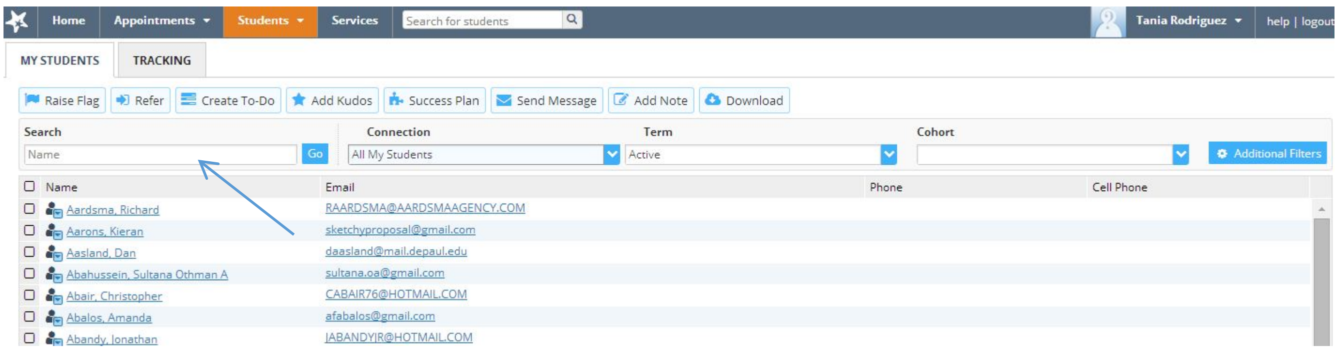
What an ideal note/outcome should do:

1. Detail your conversation with the student:	Make the notes concise, and avoid assumptions about the students behavior or intentions	**ex.** *James and I met to discuss graduation requirements. He has 3 remaining courses in the major (ENG xxx, ENG xxx, ENG xxx). I suggested he follow up with his staff professional advisor to complete a graduation review.*
2. Define concerns:	When addressing concerns, stick to the facts and do not divulge personal matters in details	**ex.** *James and I met for a second time this month. I am concerned about his disengaged behavior in class and the personal information he shared with me about his family. I have made a referral to the Dean of Students.*
3. State specific requirements discussed during your meeting:	This is an opportunity to document information given to the student regarding their academic requirements	**ex.** *James inquired about his language requirement. After reviewing his DPR and confirming he only had two years of high school language, I informed him that he was required to complete a year of language at DePaul. I sent him to the College Office for follow up on the language requirements.*

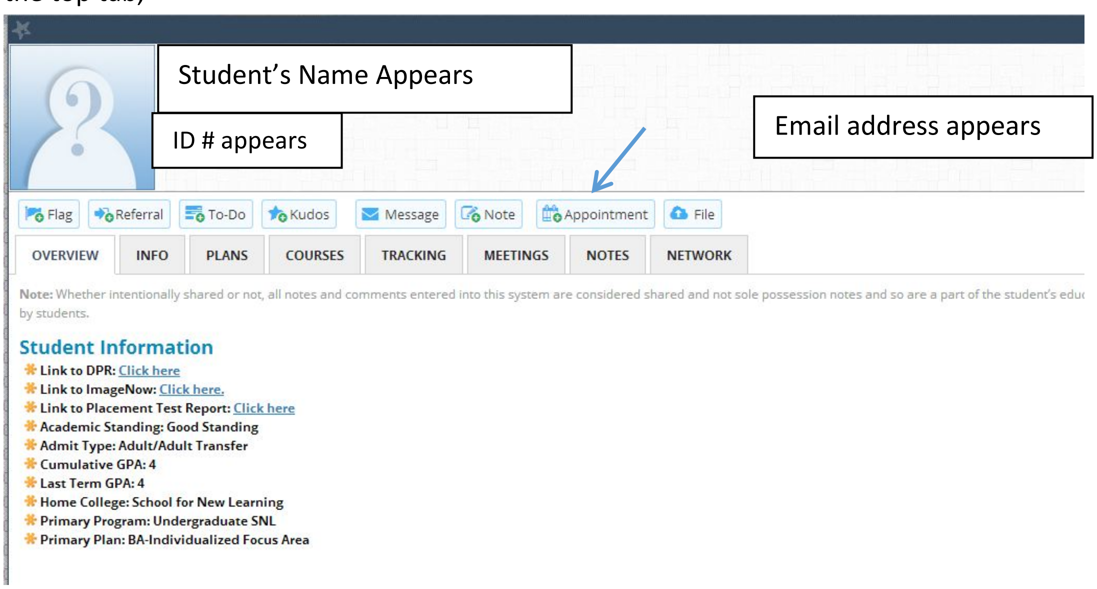
How to Enter Appointment Outcomes in Blue Star

1. From the BlueStar's main page select the "Students" tab;

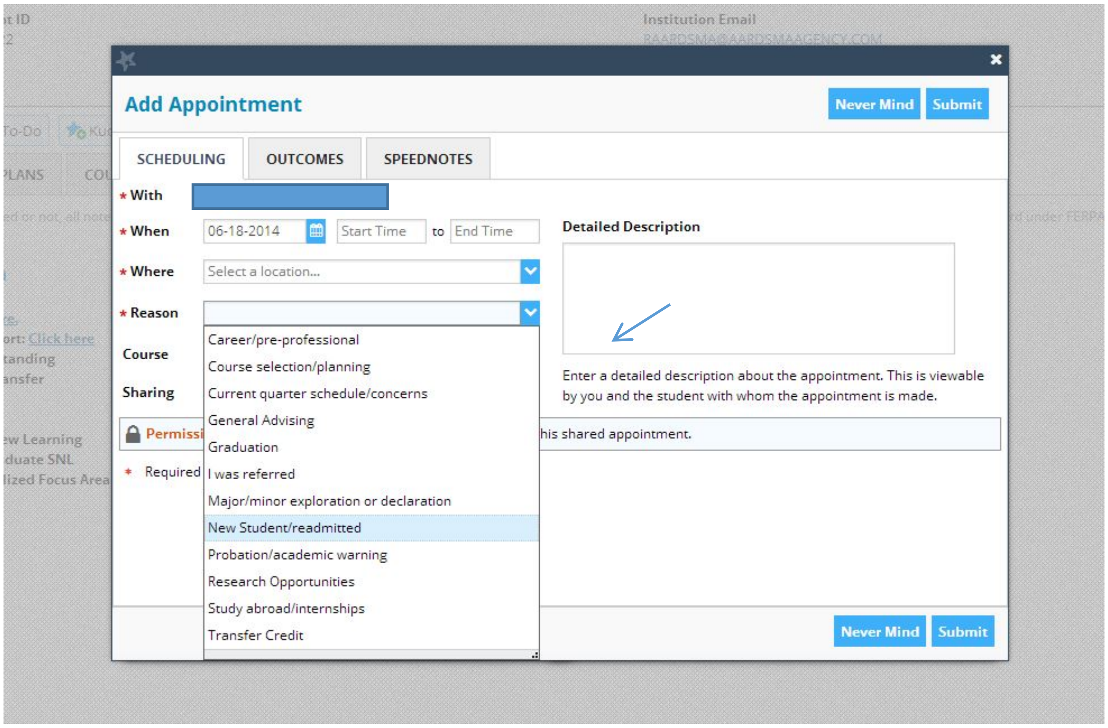
2. The page will display all DePaul students. In the "Search" box type in the name of the student that you are writing an appointment outcome for, you can enter last name first and then first name or their student identification number, then select go. Once the name has appeared select on the hyperlinked name;



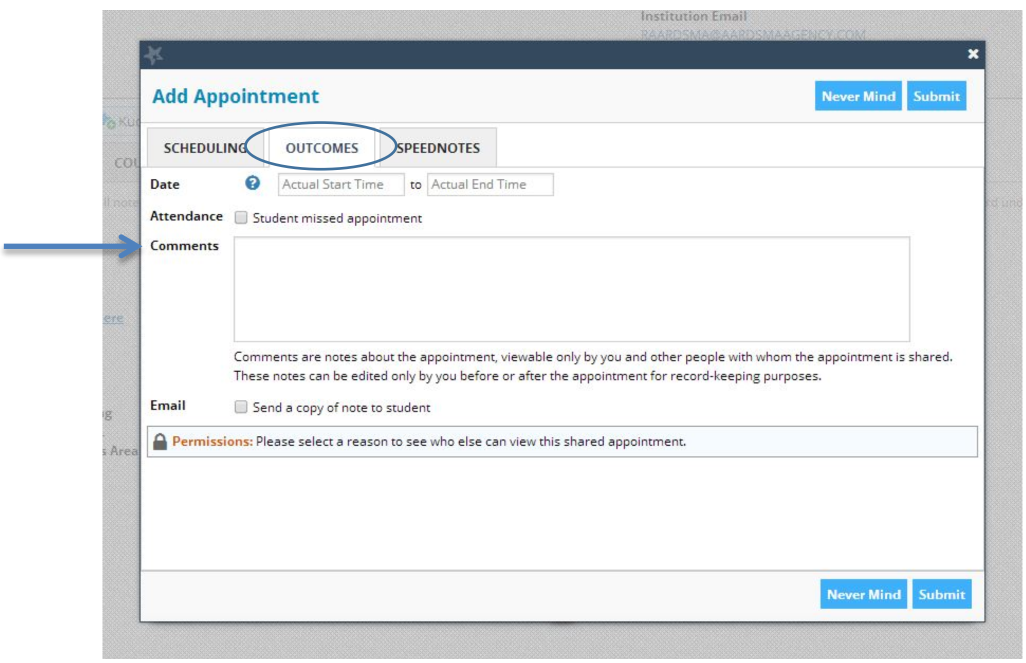
3. This will bring up the student's page. To write your advising outcomes select "Appointment" on the top tab;



4. A smaller window will open for you to write your advising outcomes. Enter date, time of meeting, and select the "Reason" for the meeting; do not enter any comments in the detailed description area;



5. Next, select the second tab, "OUTCOMES," and enter your detailed notes in the "Comments" box:



You may select “Send a copy of note to student” if you would like to share this note with the student.

6. Once you have entered your notes, proceed to the third tab, “SPEEDNOTES,” and scroll down to check off the topics discussed during your advising session. Once complete select “Submit”.