

Student Guidance as a form of learning



**Maastricht
University**

Student Guidance with you

Student Guidance at UM

At Maastricht University, Student Guidance is an integral part of the teaching and learning environment we offer our students. That means that at UM we see our visions on education, assessment and Student Guidance as interlinked and complementary.

This booklet outlines what those connections are and how they help as we consider our Student Guidance practice in all its roles. It captures existing practices and provides inspiration for further development. The primary audience for this booklet is Student Guidance practitioners at Maastricht University, including student advisers, mentors, academic advisers, and career counsellors.

The **UM Vision on Education** states that “*UM aims to educate students to become lifelong learners and professionals who can define, analyse, and solve complex problems, who think critically and adapt when faced with challenges in a regional, national, and international context. Students are trained to be global citizens: active, globally oriented citizens who make a meaningful contribution to society.*”

Ever since its foundation, UM has done that by offering its students a learning environment based on Problem-Based Learning that is constructive, contextual, collaborative and self-directed. Furthermore, UM follows the principles of Constructive Alignment, which say that learning benefits from a clear alignment between the goals, formats, and assessment of learning.

The **UM Vision on Assessment** emphasises that within the broader educational vision, assessment needs to be meaningful for the learning process of our students. It should support the CCCS principles of learning, and it needs to be coordinated at the level of the academic programmes.

The **UM Student Guidance Vision** says that “*UM Student Guidance engages every student in a formative learning experience that empowers them to be competent and confident in articulating their goals and values. We help them to deal with adversity and thrive as members of their UM community and beyond.*”

A formative experience

In this booklet we explore whether and how UM's leading educational principles offer insights and suggestions for approaching Student Guidance as a form of learning.

Generally, this would mean that Student Guidance:

- is an intentionally designed learning activity that helps students achieve the intended learning objectives of the curriculum of their programmes, the university's graduate attributes, as well as their personal learning objectives.
- is an integral part of the study programme, aligned with the academic curriculum: students see connections between what they discuss and learn in Student Guidance and what they learn within the academic programme;
- is a process where the intended outcomes of Student Guidance, our interventions, and the way we draw conclusions about their impact are in alignment.

In guidance conversations and interventions, students develop the ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses, explore learning opportunities, and set long-term goals that evolve with their aspirations. Guidance scaffolds this process by helping students identify their needs and relate these to the purpose and objectives of the study programme. They learn to accept and adapt to challenges, recover from setbacks, and extract valuable lessons from failures. This cultivates a mindset focused on lifelong personal and academic development. Over time, these constructive experiences combine to form a coherent narrative that helps students understand how past and current experiences shape their future trajectories.

CCCS and Constructive Alignment

This booklet offers insights, hints, and reflective questions to develop your Student Guidance practice using two models that are fundamental to learning at UM.

As a foundation, we use PBL's core concepts of CCCS: constructive, contextual, collaborative, and self-directed learning. We describe each concept's broader meaning and its application to Student Guidance.

Constructive Alignment purposefully links learning objectives, activities, and assessments in the design, implementation, and evaluation of Student Guidance programmes. The tables illustrate this approach, but they are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Each section includes considerations for reflecting on your individual approach and programme.

Constructive learning: actively creating new knowledge

Students can understand information more easily and retain it longer when they play an active role in acquiring new knowledge by connecting it to what they already know.

In the context of Student Guidance, this means that:

- Learning involves making connections between past experiences and aspirations (looking back and looking forward) and how students perceive their own abilities (looking at the present). In other words, this fosters a process of self-discovery;
- Students use (past) experiences to adapt to challenges and set and adjust goals. Constructive learning means understanding how past experiences influence future paths, developing the ability to articulate the story of one's academic journey, and cultivating awareness of one's own learning.

In guidance conversations and interventions, students develop the ability to critically discuss and assess their strengths and weaknesses, explore opportunities for learning, engage constructively with disagreement and conflict, and set long-term goals that evolve with their aspirations.

This could translate into

Intended outcomes	Ways of learning	Seeing progress
An increased ability to learn from experiences and apply that to future plans and actions	Formal and informal reflection - in one-on-one conversations with staff and/or students, in exercises, with or without the use of tools like a portfolio	Observe, record and discuss progress - also with the student
Being able to inform oneself	Asking students to find information while making sure information within our purview is transparent and accessible	Observe how often a student asks for basic information, how often they say they didn't know about a service, opportunity, or procedure

Points to consider

In which way am I actively encouraging students to reflect critically and challenge their assumptions?

How does my guidance acknowledge students' past experiences? Does it focus on building new skills, experiences, and knowledge?

How do my guidance practices help students make sense of their experiences and articulate their personal and academic identity?

How do I encourage students to explore and step outside their comfort zones? What opportunities do they have to experience and resolve constructive conflict and disagreement with themselves and others?

How do I support students in developing a coherent narrative about their educational journey and growth?



Contextual learning: putting things in perspective

It is easier for students to learn, understand and value their study topic when they see how it relates to other things: the bigger picture of a topic, their interests, a discipline, and the world.

In the context of Student Guidance, this means that:

- Students give meaning and value to what they are learning within their academic programme and beyond, which helps them value and prioritise, and make well-informed choices when possible or necessary
- Students connect their learning to the world around them, and the role they can play in it.

Student Guidance allows students to situate themselves and their learning in real-life experiences and broader societal contexts. This approach helps make knowledge not only more meaningful but also transferable across various areas of life and work. As they engage in this process, students critically reflect on how their values, beliefs, and actions influence others and are shaped by global, cultural, and systemic forces. As students navigate a range of transitions and decisions, from entering university, moving between study phases, to approaching graduation, they learn to make sense of their experiences, weaving diverse learning moments into a coherent understanding of their personal and academic journey.

This could translate into

Intended outcomes	Ways of learning	Seeing progress
Being able to explain why you study what you study	Peer-to-peer conversations, student-mentor conversations, orientation sessions, portfolio updates	Observe, record and discuss how students talk about this; discuss and review portfolio entries - also with the student
Being able to prioritise - within the study programme and beyond	Individual conversations with a Student Guidance practitioner, group exercises, and provision of clear information about the programme	Observe, record and discuss how students talk about this; review student academic progress
Being able to reflect on values and take informed and responsible action	Student-mentor conversations	Observe behaviour that is congruent with expressed values

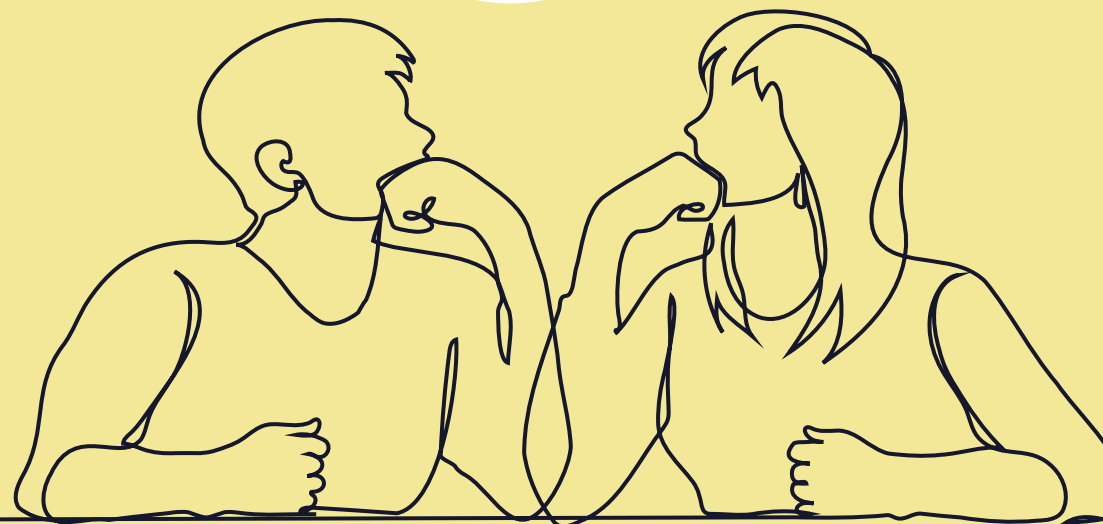
Points to consider

In which way am I helping students develop a global awareness of how their values and actions affect others and the world?

How do I help students connect their academic learning to real-life contexts and civic responsibilities?

How do I support students in navigating life transitions and making meaning of them?

How does my guidance help students attribute meaning to what and how they are studying?



Collaborative learning: sharing work and responsibility

Learning together means that students must define goals, take responsibility and reach an agreement as a team. To share their ideas with others, they need to organise them and articulate them. Learning with others enhances their individual learning.

In the context of Student Guidance, this means that students:

- Are encouraged to articulate and find words for what motivates them and what holds them back;
- Develop the ability to listen carefully to others and learn from their peers;
- See their role in the larger learning effort, both their own and that of others, developing reasonable expectations and assuming responsibility.

Collaboration in Student Guidance is based on shared goals, reciprocal interactions, and a collective understanding of personal and academic challenges. Students learn to engage meaningfully with others, fostering a sense of community, empathy, and mutual respect. In guidance settings, students practise inclusive and empathetic communication, learning to consider diverse perspectives and to create space for emotions, values, and lived experiences that are different from their own. Through one-on-one conversations, guided peer advising, group sessions, and mentoring, students learn with and from one another, fostering shared decision-making and collaborative knowledge construction.

This could translate into

Intended outcomes	Ways of learning	Seeing progress
Knowing how to articulate ideas so that others respond in a meaningful way - Student Guidance practitioners as well as fellow students	Peer-to-peer conversations, peer learning, group advising, orientation sessions, portfolio updates	Observe, record and discuss - also with the student
Being able to work with others and contribute to a collaborative process and culture	Reflection on role in PBL, group assignments in the context of Student Guidance, and flipped-advising (student prepares advising session)	

Points to consider

How do I foster an environment where students express themselves and seek support?

How do I help students develop skills in setting boundaries, giving/receiving feedback, and participating in shared decision-making?

Which opportunities do I provide for students to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and learn from diverse perspectives?

How do we notice that we have organised Student Guidance in such a way that students have an active role in it?



Self-directed learning: taking charge of your learning

Self-directed learners set their own goals and develop strategies for achieving these. They are aware of how they learn and study and make decisions about what to do next.

In the context of Student Guidance, this means that students:

- Are encouraged and supported to set their own goals;
- Are expected to assume responsibility for their own learning, including their engagement with Student Guidance activities;
- Develop an understanding of how they learn (metacognition);
- Can regulate their emotions in stressful, uncomfortable or uncertain situations and overcome obstacles and failures while maintaining trust in their judgement and instincts.

At the core of Student Guidance is the belief that learners should be the authors of their journeys. Rather than teaching students what to think, the focus is on enabling students to set clear, actionable goals, and prioritise learning strategies based on their aspirations, abilities and boundaries. This guidance fosters self-efficacy, encouraging students to make decisions and face challenges with confidence and resilience. This includes the ability to accept the current state and to recognise difficult moments as temporary rather than finite.

This could translate into

Intended outcomes	Ways of learning	Seeing progress
Being able to set one's own goals (if relevant and possible: make curriculum choices)	Individual conversations with a Student Guidance practitioner, group exercises, and a portfolio	Observe, record and discuss how students talk about this; discuss and review portfolio entries related to academic progress - also with the student
Being able to organise learning	Setting (learning) goals for Student Guidance, flipped-advising	
Being able to see one's own role and responsibility	Formal and informal reflection - in one-on-one conversations with staff and/or students, in exercises, with or without the use of tools like a portfolio	

Points to consider

How do I help students develop strategies for managing their learning, time, and energy?

How do I notice that my interactions empower students to solve problems and deal with setbacks independently while knowing support is available if needed?

How do I support students in setting and revising meaningful personal and academic goals?

Which tools, space, and support am I providing to help students take ownership of their learning, make informed decisions, and reflect on their development?



In conclusion

In a CCCS environment, a Student Guidance practitioner is neither a course scheduler nor a problem-fixer; they are a learning catalyst who helps students turn experience into purpose-driven action.

CCCS facet	The role of the adviser	What it gives the student
Constructive	Invites students to unpack experiences, interpret successes and setbacks, and connect new insights to prior knowledge	Clear meaning-making, growth mindset
Contextual	Helps students link academic choices to personal values, real-life goals, communities, and careers	Relevance, articulation of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, and a sense of direction
Collaborative	Nurtures peer learning, models open questioning and creates safe spaces where diverse voices and perspectives can meet	Belonging, shared understanding, sense of relevance and responsibility
Self-directed	Scaffolds goal setting, metacognition, and strategic planning, while gradually handing over the reins	Agency, confidence, and self-management skills

Across all four facets, the Student Guidance practitioner listens with curiosity, normalises experimentation (including productive failure), and holds a “big picture” view of the student as a whole person rather than a set of credit requirements.

In short, a CCCS Student Guidance practitioner is a compassionate listener as well as a reflective guide, bridge-builder, dialogue partner, coach and teacher who equips students to construct knowledge, situate it in authentic contexts, learn with others, and ultimately steer their own educational journey.

the CCCS
Student Guidance
practitioner is a
learning catalyst



Maastricht University

Student Guidance **with you**

Authors: Iris Burks, Lena Gromotka, Oscar van den Wijngaard

The following experts and groups provided valuable input and advice:

Saskia van Bergen (Student Care Officer FASoS), Wilfred van Dellen (Coordinator Academic Advising UCM), Diana Dolmans (Professor Health Professions Education Innovation), Joyce Heunen (Team Lead Career Services), Arie van der Lugt (Professor of Experiential Education), Joey Mak (Student Adviser SBE), Dominique Waterval (Student Adviser FHML), Niklas Wenzel (PhD Researcher Self-Regulated Learning), SUMa Steering Committee, Student Guidance Programme Sounding Board, EDLAB Advisory Board, EDLAB Education Innovation team.

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