

A 2007 Guide to the Focus Area System

How does the focus area advising system work?

- When a student starts at NCSU-CVM, he/she is assigned a faculty advisor. The advisor will be responsible for introducing that student to veterinary medicine, advising the student on selective/elective choices, signing the clinical competency book yearly and helping the student choose a focus area. Once the student chooses a focus area, the focus area advisor will replace the original advisor.
- The student can officially declare a focus area as early as first year. All students must declare a focus area by September 15 of the fall semester of the third year. (Please note that the Clinician Scientist Focus Area strongly encourages declaration during the first year in order to get in at least 1 summer research experience during the first 3 years. For students with substantial research experience, they may be allowed to declare the Clinician Scientist Focus as late as the end of the second year, based on the decision of the Focus Area coordinators.)
- In order to have focus area priority for required electives and selectives in a given semester, the focus area must be declared by September 15 in the fall semester and January 15 in the spring semester.
- In order to officially declare the focus area, the student must submit the Declaration of Focus Area form to Dr. Bristol's office, signed by the faculty member chosen as advisor, then signed by the focus area leader.
- The official advisor for the focus area can be the same advisor the student was assigned at the start of first year, or can be a different person.
- The number of students that each faculty member can advise is limited. Each focus area has a number of advisors. It is the advisor's decision as to how many advisees he/she can handle, with the minimum number being 2 advisees per year.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of early declaration of a focus area?

- First, a little perspective. In the overall curriculum, approximately 75% of the material is taught in core courses and 25% is taught in electives, selectives, and elective clinical rotations. A student won't miss key material by not declaring early.
- Early declaration of a focus area will allow the student to work with an advisor to develop an optimal plan to train the student for the particular focus area. It will also give the student priority in the required electives, selectives and clinical rotations for that focus area.

- The disadvantage of early declaration is that it may force a student in a direction that later changes with exposure to new opportunities. It would be better for a student without a strong focus to try several areas before deciding on a focus area. The system does allow a switch of focus area, but the process is a bit painful!
- The disadvantage of late declaration is that certain focus areas have enough requirements in the second and third years that it would be very difficult for a student to catch up. Students should look carefully at the requirements of the different focus areas to make sure that they have enough time left to complete the requirements.

How do I find out what the focus areas are and what the requirements are?

- Go to http://www.cvm.ncsu.edu/studentservices/dvm_program/focus_areas/ for the most up-to-date description of each focus area and its' requirements. Core rotations that all students must take are radiology, clinical pathology, anesthesia, necropsy, one medicine course, one surgery course, one population medicine course, and one intensive care/emergency medicine course. Every focus area must have between 14-16 required blocks.
- Focus area leaders present the details of the area to the first year students each spring.
- Ask the focus area leader:

Food Animal Medicine: monte_mccaw@ncsu.edu,
 Mixed Animal Medicine: lizette_hardie@ncsu.edu
 Clinician Scientist: matthew_breen@ncsu.edu
 Small Animal Medicine: laurel_williams@ncsu.edu
 Pathology: don_meuten@ncsu.edu,
 Zoological Medicine: michael_stoskopf@ncsu.edu
 Laboratory Animal Medicine: rick_fish@ncsu.edu,
 Equine Medicine: betta_breuhhaus@ncsu.edu,
 Epidemiology: malcolm_roberts@ncsu.edu

How does the focus area system work as far as prioritization in course selection?

- Students with a declared focus area get priority in the selectives, electives and clinical rotations required for the focus area.
- The priority for required electives and selectives is:
 - 3rd year student with declared focus area
 - 2nd year student with declared focus area
 - 1st year student with declared focus area
 - 2nd year undeclared student
 - 1st year undeclared student

- Students with a Clinician Scientist Focus are a little different. They have a custom program and get priority in the courses required by the program.
- The priority for 4th year rotations is that students for whom the rotation is required get priority, then all others.
- Students who switch from one focus area to another will be given priority behind the other students in that focus area
- The student leaders and Dr. Bristol's office have a very sophisticated system for handling all these priorities. Please DON'T go to the instructor for an exception if there are too many people trying to get into a course with limited enrollment. DO let the class leaders know so that they can negotiate for additional spaces, if possible. If there is disagreement about a specific prioritization, Dr. Bristol's office and the class leaders handle it.
- If you are a third year student applying for an internship, you **MUST** list the key rotations needed to get recommendations as your first choices in the senior year block selection. Reference letters are due in December and you need to have taken the rotations by that time. Just being in a focus area does not give a student enough priority to get the needed blocks in time, if the blocks are listed as later choices.

How does a student switch focus areas?

- Submit a Change of Focus Area Form signed by both the new and old advisors to Phyllis Edwards. The reasons for the change must be detailed on the form. The change must be approved by the Curriculum Committee. **The last time a student can switch is September 15, third year.**
- Students admitted under the Food Animal Scholars program **MAY NOT** switch focus areas. They remain in the Food Animal focus area for all four years.
- There is a penalty for switching focus areas. Students who switch into a focus area will be given priority behind the other focus area students. This penalty will apply, no matter when the switch is made.

How often should I meet with my advisor?

- The minimum will be once a semester, for you to go over the choice of electives, selectives, rotations and/or externships. The clinical competencies book must be signed by your advisor each year. You should give your advisor a copy of the backup for your clinical competencies book each year.
- The maximum is up to you and your advisor. Students aiming for internships, residencies and graduate programs may need to meet more often.
- The advisor is responsible for scheduling the first meeting with the student. Thereafter, the student is responsible for arranging the meetings.

Selectives and electives

- Selectives/electives have two equally important missions:

- exposing students to areas of veterinary medicine with which they may be less familiar
- allowing students with a clear interest to gain expertise in their chosen field
- The faculty members in a focus area, in conjunction with the focus area leader, are responsible for creating the elective and selective courses and may target them as they wish. Courses designed to expose students of any year to a subject will not be limited (except by number of students admitted), but some courses may have restricted enrollment.
 - Courses designed to expose students to a focus area may be limited to first and second year students.
 - Required focus area courses will have enough spaces so that all focus area students can take them. However, in many instances the requirement is to pick one of several courses. Each of these courses may have a limited enrollment.
 - Some courses will require permission of the instructor. Permission DOES NOT guarantee admission to the course (that is handled by the selection priority scheme).

Extramural experiences

- See the extramural studies website for forms and rules.
- Please remember that all extramural experiences must be approved by your advisor.

FOCUS AREA FORM

Student's Name: _____ Year _____

E-Mail: _____

Phone Number: _____

FOCUS AREA DECLARED:

FOCUS AREA LEADER: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

ADVISOR FOR FOCUS AREA: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

(Return form to Phyllis Edwards)

FOR CLINICIAN SCIENTIST FOCUS AREA STUDENTS ONLY:

Submit your list of required courses, signed by your advisor and the focus area leader, as part of your registration for the focus area.

REQUEST FOR CHANGE OF FOCUS AREA

Student Name: _____ Year _____

Current Focus Area: _____ Desired Focus Area: _____

Reason for requesting a change:

Signatures:

Student:

Date:

Current Advisor:

Date:

Proposed (New) Advisor:

Date:

Current Focus Leader:

Date:

Proposed (New) Focus Leader:

Date:

Focus area changes become effective September 15 or January 15, whichever comes first. Students who change focus areas get priority scheduling for the new focus area AFTER the students already in that focus area.

(Return form to Phyllis Edwards. The change must be approved by the Curriculum Committee.)