Welcome to UNCG, and welcome to the College of Visual & Performing Arts. My name is Jennifer Reich, and I am the Director of Undergraduate Advising and Student Success in the College. I work with the best advising team on campus, which includes Sidney Stretz, Undergraduate Academic Advisor, and Abigail Hart, Arts Education Student Support Specialist.

Here are the three of us at the National Academic Advising Association, or NACADA, Annual Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in October 2019. Abigail is on the left, Sidney is in the middle, and I (Jennifer) am on the right.

We all have long titles, but what they really mean is that our primary responsibility is making sure our students get an excellent start at UNCG, continue towards graduation successfully, and ultimately graduate in a timely fashion. In fact, I would venture to guess that our goal is likely the goal shared by all of you watching this as well. I am hoping this presentation gets us started on that journey together.

The College of Visual and Performing Arts was just founded in August 2016, so we are preparing to celebrate our fourth birthday. Prior to 2016, we were housed in different Colleges and Schools across the University, and in coming together, we have become the largest and most comprehensive school of the visual and performing arts in North Carolina and one of the largest in the nation. We include the Schools of Art, Dance, Music and Theatre, as well as interdisciplinary programs in Arts Administration, Social Practice and Arts in Community. We have over 1300 undergraduate students in total and more than 150 faculty members across each of our disciplines.

I'm here today representing the faculty and staff of the College of Visual and Performing Arts, and we are all so glad to welcome you into our space, and we invite you to be artist-scholars alongside of us. While the disciplines of art, dance, music and theatre may be quite different, the glue that holds all of us together is our deep and abiding commitment to the importance, even necessity, of the arts to create a meaningful and enjoyable life.
Ok, so now we’re going to shift away from introductions and move into talking about how we can get your students to graduation. (Slide 16) As college students, they’ll have lots of requirements to earn their degree. These usually take the form of either major requirements (the art, dance, music and theatre courses) or general education requirements. (Slide 17) First, I’d like to talk more about general education. Students often overlook these courses, however, they have such significance in our world as artists. General education allows for the development of multiple points of entry into a chosen career field. (Slide 18) A life in the arts almost never takes the path that a student expects. Being open to possibilities and being able to recognize them when they present themselves reflects an expansive rather than a narrow education.

(Slide 19) You’ll often hear people say that general education’s purpose is to make you a well-rounded person. While this idea is not entirely incorrect, I would say that the purpose and value of general education goes beyond just knowledge of areas outside your own. Studying disciplines outside our own does open one up to knowledge, but it’s what we do with this knowledge that’s important. (Slide 20) We are not islands. We must connect to each other and to the greater world every single day. General education courses provide us with an understanding of the importance of working across diverse backgrounds and ideas, enabling us to make decisions, act ethically, and communicate ideas effectively in writing and in conversation. (Slide 21) In today’s world, it’s these “soft skills” that employers are requesting of new hires. In fact, in 2013, the American Association of Colleges and Universities conducted a survey of over 300 employers. Overwhelmingly, 93% of the employers said “a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate’s] undergraduate major.” What these statistics say to me is that general education is actually quite valuable.

(Slide 22) Under each general education requirement at UNCG, your student will normally have some choices to make. For example, would they prefer a science course about biology or chemistry or nutrition or something else? A social science in anthropology, psychology or sociology? A history course about the ancient world or the 20th century? While, in some general education categories, there isn’t much choice at all—all students are required to take a version of College Writing 1, for example. (Slide 23) A really great way for our students to approach general education is to think about what skills a class
could teach: for example, Introduction to Communication Studies meets a general education requirement. More importantly, though, it prepares you to speak in public and formulate persuasive thoughts, which would come in handy when presenting a pitch to clients or when writing an artist’s statement or when teaching in their own classroom someday.

(Slide 24) Now I’d like to address the idea of what a “perfect” schedule looks like for arts students. I am sure that you’ve heard people talking about getting general education requirements “out of the way,” and you may have friends with students at other schools whose classes for the fall semester are all or nearly all general education classes. In the College of Visual and Performing Arts, our schedules look very different from that scenario. (Slide 25) Remember that each discipline varies a bit, but most of your students will be taking about 2 or 3 general education classes and then a variety of classes in their major. This set-up is key to success in the arts. Students must be immersed in their discipline from the beginning and must spread general education over the whole of their time at school. Remember that there is no deadline to completing general education courses other than graduation!

(Slide 26) Now we’re going to talk a bit about how advising works in the College of Visual & Performing Arts. All of your students will be assigned to an advisor during Fall semester who specializes in working with first year students—namely, Abigail, Sidney or me. We encourage students to work with an advisor whenever they need help, but we require a minimum of three check-ins throughout freshman year: (Slide 27) during the summer before students begin, (Slide 28) during Fall semester, and (Slide 29) during Spring semester. (Slide 30) We will work together so that students understand major, minor, and general education options and requirements and so that students recognize the wide array of appropriate resources to ensure academic and personal success at UNCG. After this first year, students will be assigned to a faculty member in their discipline for advising.

(Slide 31) For this first semester at UNCG, the CVPA Student Success Team is working diligently, using the Academic Advising Inventory (AAI) that your student submitted through their SpartanLink account, to register them for classes. All students will be registered for a complete schedule of courses, including both major requirements and general education classes. (Slide 32) Schedules vary a bit by major, but in the College of Visual and Performing Arts,
typically students have 15-16 credit hours overall, with two or three general education courses and the rest of the courses being major-specific courses.

(Slide 33) After your student attends June virtual SOAR, they will be invited to a Canvas organization where they will be learning all about UNCG’s vast array of opportunities and support services. One part of Canvas will be from the CVPA Student Success Team, and includes a series of videos on the following topics:

- **(Slide 34) A Welcome to CVPA**
- **(Slide 35) CVPA General Education Requirements** (where we explain the requirements like math, science, English, social studies, etc.)
- **(Slide 36) Previous Credit** (how your student's AP/IB scores translate into courses, and how courses taken at community colleges and other universities transfer to UNCG)
- **(Slide 37) Using UNCGenie** (how to navigate the Genie account, which is your student's tool for academic and financial aid records)
- **(Slide 38) Understanding DegreeWorks** (which is the software we use to track student requirements and progress towards degree)
- **(Slide 39) Searching for Classes with the Class Schedule** (this is how students look up what courses are being offered, when they are, how many seats there are remaining in them, etc.)
- **(Slide 40) Registration** (where your student can see what they are registered for and make adjustments if they deem them necessary)
- **(Slide 41) Transfer Students** (not surprisingly, this video includes information specifically for students who are transferring to UNCG)

(Slide 42) I know the students will feel inundated with so many videos and resources, but these are really important so that students can begin taking ownership of this educational process—these are their requirements, their courses, their schedules and their degrees. **(Slide 43) Here’s a statistic for you:** in the state of North Carolina, 1 in 3 adults has a post-high school degree (either 2 year, 4-year, or graduate degree). I know the kinds of sacrifices that you are making for your students to attend college. Many of the students also know about those sacrifices, but they are 17 or 18 years old and don’t have the benefit of your lived experience and wisdom, and therefore, may not really understand what kind of opportunity they are receiving. You and I are in this mission together, to help the students understand the value of this experience.
For example, using DegreeWorks, the tool that tracks progress towards graduation, should make it so that there is NEVER a point in your student’s academic career where he or she says something like, “I have no idea why I am taking this course.” If they say that to you, please challenge them on it! Ask them to look in DegreeWorks, and if that doesn’t clear up the situation, ask them to email their advisor. Family members are often an advisor’s biggest ally, and if we work together, we can get your student to graduation.

I like to think of the partnership between us, family members and advisors, as the base of a triangle, whereby we work together to support your student, who is at the peak of the triangle. To that end, encourage your student to build a relationship with their advisor and to work with them to tackle whatever questions or challenges they may have. Don’t feel like you have to solve your student’s academic problems for them—knowing university policies and procedures and how to interpret them and communicate them to college freshmen is why we have jobs! We are very happy to talk to your student about these issues at any time.

In July, the CVPA Student Success Team will be reaching out to your students with information about their schedules, and we will be available for optional video conferencing and/or email advising to discuss changes the students may wish to make to their schedules or any other questions or concerns they may have. Please help them remember to stay tuned to their UNCG email accounts and Canvas notifications for more information.

Finally, I want to remind you all of some of the best reasons for studying the arts. It’s not often that you hear news stories discussing the importance of the arts and of arts education, particularly given the current obsession with STEM disciplines, but I want to briefly remind all of us how skills in the arts are applicable to academic and life success. I have found that sometimes my students have all the skills to tackle the first year, but they so easily forget that they are equipped. Remember that their creativity, confidence, problem-solving skills, perseverance, focus, communication skills, ability to receive and give constructive criticism, ability to collaborate, dedication, and accountability, all skills that your students have developed as artists, will take them far. Remind them to employ these skills freely and often.
We are so pleased to welcome you and your students to our community of artists at UNCG!