

ACADEMIC ADVISING
IN AN EXPANDED YALE COLLEGE

Report of the Committee on
Advising, Placement, and Enrollment

April 4, 2016



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INTRODUCTION

In fall of 2017, fewer than eighteen months from now, Yale College will welcome a freshmen class with 1600 students, 250 more students than our current target for freshman classes. Over the following four years, the undergraduate student body will increase by 800 students, which represents a fifteen percent increase in the number of undergraduates. Dean Holloway charged our committee in October 2016 with studying the impact of the expansion on our academic advising system, particularly during the freshman year. Our attention was drawn in particular to the fact that most of our freshmen are currently advised by members of the faculty who volunteer to do so as fellows of their residential colleges, but there are currently no plans to increase the size of the FAS faculty. With more students to advise, but with no additional faculty to serve as advisers, college masters and deans will be under pressure to extract more advising labor from their fellows. Even under current circumstances, it can be difficult to secure enough appropriate advisers to serve freshmen well. Furthermore, previous assessments of freshman advising have identified a number of deficiencies in our current system, which might worsen with an increase in students.

The Committee on Advising, Placement, and Enrollment is a new standing committee in Yale College that has inherited the advising portfolio of the Committee on Teaching, Learning, and Advising after that committee was returned to its previous instantiation as the Committee on Teaching and Learning. Prior to the constitution of CAPE, some preliminary work on the questions we were charged with studying had been undertaken by the New Residential Colleges Working Group. The Working Group produced a memorandum entitled “Academic Advising and the New Residential Colleges” (hereafter the “Working Group Memo”). We found that document’s excellent characterization and analysis of academic advising in Yale College to be foundational for our work. Rather than reformulating the content of the Working Group Memo, we incorporate it by reference here, and have reproduced it in an appendix to this report.

We want to begin our report by highlighting several themes of the Working Group Memo that have guided our development of the recommendations that appear later in this report:

1. *We reaffirm that the residential-college system provides an organic and integrated context for freshman academic advising, particularly about general matters.*

Residential college fellowships are at the heart of freshman advising, and the advising experience is a crucial component of affiliation with the college for both advisees and fellows. The recommendations below flow from a commitment to preserving this essential feature of freshman advising.

2. *We reaffirm that students should transition from college-based advising to major-based advising once they declare a major.*

Juniors and seniors are advised by the DUSes of their majors, or, in the case of large majors, by their representatives. Our committee believes this system is working well at present,

though we noted some variance in student satisfaction across majors. We also noted that some departments and programs have developed—often out of necessity—their own tools and structures for advising students, especially in large majors, and we encourage greater collaboration among DUSes about advising models that work well. We also recommend that in no less than five years' time, when the expansion of Yale College is complete, this committee should study the impact of the increased size of the student body on major-based advising, particularly in light of the Working Group Memo's evaluation of upperclass advising.

3. *We reaffirm that college-based advising should be designed to be broad, holistic, and longitudinal.*

While this has been the intention of freshman advising for many years, we believe that in a significant number of cases, the freshman adviser-advisee relationship has become transactional and focused on the approval of the course schedule. Our first set of recommendations below (1–4) is designed to steer participants in this relationship away from a narrow focus on course schedules and toward more holistic conversations that will ideally last from the beginning of freshman year until the student selects a major, and perhaps longer.

4. *We reaffirm the importance of serving freshmen and sophomores who need specific advice about course placement or prerequisites for a course or a major, particularly in the STEM fields.*

The Working Group Memo identified this as a problem, and our research confirmed that students and faculty alike feel that students need better access to personalized, accurate information about selection and timing of introductory STEM courses. Freshman advisers are rarely prepared to provide this information, and yet students sometimes expect that this sort of advice is what they will receive from freshman advisers. We hope that the first set of recommendations will help students understand not to expect this sort of advice from their faculty/staff adviser. Our second set of recommendations (5–7) is intended to give students access to accurate and personalized information through a combination of peer advising programs and self-advising resources.

5. *We reaffirm the recent efforts to address the particular challenges that first-generation and low-income freshmen face in their academic and social adjustment to Yale College.*

The success of the recently implemented Freshman Scholars at Yale (FSY) program was frequently noted and widely praised by students and staff, even though many other eligible students cannot participate in the program because of its limited size. We urge continued support of that program, and we recommend expanding its size, if feasible, and extending some of its programming during the academic year to build on the work done during the summer and to include students who were unable to attend the summer program.

PROCESS

The committee's deliberations took place over a six-month period. We met seven times as a full committee, and an informal policy subcommittee consisting of the committee's officers and its representatives from the Yale College Dean's Office met several times to coordinate our recommendations with other YCDO policies and initiatives.

The Goals of Advising

One of the major challenges we faced — and will continue to face — is that, to quote one of our members, “neither the advisers nor the advisees know what they're supposed to be doing.” To make sure that we as a committee were avoiding this same pitfall, we took a deliberate approach to the question of what freshman advising is supposed to do. One of our early take-home assignments was to have each committee member answer five questions:

- What goals is the current academic advising system attempting to accomplish?
- Which of these things are we doing well?
- Which are we doing poorly that must be done better?
- Which are we doing poorly that might be better handled outside the umbrella of academic advising?
- Are there goals that the academic advising system should have that are not current priorities?

In discussing our collective responses, we found a wide variety of views, but were able to agree with the Working Group Memo's characterization of the broad goals of advising. Most of us agreed that the current system does not always succeed in providing specific and tailored academic advice, particularly as it relates to course selection (and particularly for STEM students).

Ultimately, we have concluded that the best-case scenario for the freshman advising system is one in which incoming Yale students are able to form a holistic relationship with what we have come to think of as an “adult conversation partner.” These discussions will, naturally, touch on students' academic and intellectual lives at Yale, but will do so in a less punitive (given that students may be fined for failing to see their advisers under the current system) and less transactional way, one which will leave room for broader interactions that also incorporate freshmen's social and cultural lives and well-being.

Data Collection and Analysis

During our deliberations, we considered a wide array of data regarding freshman advising. We were assisted in this effort by Deans Pamela Schirmeister and Risa Sodi, who had been assigned by Dean Holloway to undertake a “deep dive” into underclass academic advising at Yale and peer institutions during the summer of 2015. In addition to these data, our committee conducted surveys of residential-college masters and deans, freshman advisers, and students. We also conducted a number of focus groups with special undergraduate populations.

Deep Dive. We began by discussing the range of possible advising models, and considered some other institutions' systems for advising freshmen. We found that our peer institutions generally follow one of four models: faculty advising by assignment (the Yale model), faculty advising tied to a freshman seminar, advising by a dedicated staff of advisers at an advising center, or a hybrid model combining features of the other three. After considering each of these models, we decided that the connection of freshman advising to the residential colleges, and their fellowships, was a valuable and unique feature of a Yale education, and so we have chosen to maintain that aspect of the current system rather than decouple advising from the colleges altogether.

The Deep Dive team relied on a study Dean Sodi carried out in spring 2015, which provided statistics about freshman advising across Yale's residential colleges. This study revealed multiple kinds of disparity: first, different colleges have a wide range in numbers of fellows serving as freshman advisers, from 28 in Timothy Dwight to 63 in Pierson; likewise, different colleges have different standards for the number of freshmen a fellow is expected to advise (from an average of 1.9 students per adviser in Trumbull to 3.96 students per adviser in Branford). Additionally, there is inconsistency within different colleges' advising pools (ladder faculty vs. non-ladder faculty vs. staff; FAS vs. the professional schools). Finally, more broadly, there is an unequal distribution of freshman advisers by academic department (one which is incommensurate with the number of majors): for instance, Economics, a department with one of the largest undergraduate majors, currently provides only seven freshman advisers.

Surveys. We issued a survey to all twelve college masters in the fall, but participation (with a few notable exceptions) was disappointing. We learned from the survey that some masters take a deliberate and thoughtful approach to freshman advising and work closely with their deans, and others delegate the entire enterprise to the deans, who have been diligent in recruiting advisers and maintaining our current structure but have had little freedom to consider different advising structures or think at a higher level about the principles of freshman advising.

Our committee was of two minds about the conclusions to be drawn from these findings. On the one hand, we were encouraged by the thoughtfulness that went into freshman advising in several colleges, reflected in divergent practices that worked well under circumstances local to each college's staff, fellowship, and traditions. Some of us felt that an effort by the Dean of Yale College to encourage more masters and deans to take a leadership role in renovating their local advising practices and reflecting on them with their counterparts in other colleges would cultivate a diversity of practices that would ultimately result in better advising on the ground. On the other hand, we were dismayed by the perfunctory approach to advising that seems to take place in a number of colleges. Some of us felt that allowing the YCDO more discretion to determine uniform advising practices would be a safer way to improve advising on the ground. There are merits to both of these positions, and as a committee we were unable to build a strong consensus for either one. As a result, we have left this question open, but recommendations 8–11 provide some best practices that we gleaned from this survey, as well as some that arose during the committee's deliberations.

We also surveyed current freshman advisers. When asked why they agreed to serve in the role, they offered "service/duty/doing my part" as the most common response, and "to establish or maintain contact with undergraduates" as the second most common response. This survey also revealed a diverse range of opinions as to the primary purpose of the advising relationship:

some advisers focused on course selection and fulfilling requirements, while others focused more broadly on providing an “adult presence” to help with the many complications of adjusting to college life. We concluded that freshman advisers are highly motivated, but might require clearer communication about the goals of advising.

Finally, we made a very brief survey of current freshmen in three residential colleges (Calhoun, Silliman, and Timothy Dwight). This survey was disheartening, as it revealed that the majority of freshmen had met with their advisers only once or twice per term, and that the majority of meetings were twenty minutes or less (with approximately a quarter of meetings shorter than ten minutes). Substantially fewer than half of respondents selected “agree” or “strongly agree” in response to statements about adviser helpfulness with course-selection, long-range academic planning, and mentorship. These findings must be taken *cum grano salis*, however, as our sample of colleges may not have been representative, and the formulation of our questions was not as deliberate as it might have been were we not under the time pressure of the Yale College expansion.

Focus groups. Our third source of data was a series of focus groups with different subsets of the undergraduate population (generally upperclassmen, who might have more distance from and more perspective on the freshman year experience). The focus groups were initiated over the summer, by the Deep Dive team, who met with a cross-section of students as well as with an athlete-specific group and a group of former FSY students. During the fall term, we convened additional focus groups with STEM students, international students, and students of color. (The latter two groups also contained a healthy proportion of STEM students.) Though the particularities of individual focus groups (and the specific needs they raised) varied somewhat, a few points emerged clearly: that many students were relying heavily on one another for the sort of academic advice we had been expecting freshman advisers to give; that STEM students felt particularly underserved (and occasionally even led astray) by the current advising system; and, again, that students (like advisers) were uncertain what freshman advising was really for.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A More Holistic Relationship

1. *We recommend that the term “college adviser” replace the terms “freshman adviser” and “academic adviser” in the freshman context, and that a strategic communications plan be developed with the aim of communicating to all freshman and their advisers that college-based advising is designed to be broad, holistic, and longitudinal.*

The name change is meant to signal a shift away from specific academic/course-selection advice and toward a more holistic advising model, one that would certainly include a student’s general intellectual life and academic plans, but that would also explicitly consider cultural and social aspects of the freshman transition to Yale. This shift in terminology would also signal to both advisees and college advisers that the advising relationship could potentially extend well beyond the freshman year. Effective messaging will be crucially important for resetting the expectations of both advisers and advisees. As part of the strategic communications plan, we rec-

ommend that the University include language about advising in the faculty letter of appointment and discuss advising in the orientation program for new faculty. Going forward, we also envision more robust and better-supported training of college advisers.

2. *We recommend eliminating the category of “sophomore adviser,” though students should be able to choose a new college adviser at any time. Students will transition from college advising to departmental advising when they declare a major.*

Students should have the ability to change their college adviser in the event they develop a relationship with a suitable member of the faculty before declaring a major (or for any other reason). Under these circumstances, the residential college affiliations of faculty members should not limit students’ abilities to choose college advisers. The committee enthusiastically discussed the possibility of an online matching system through which students might discover suitable advisers, though the details would depend heavily on implementation.

3. *We recommend that college advisers no longer be asked to approve their advisees’ course schedules, though we encourage advisers and advisees to meet early each term to help identify any concerns promptly and to connect students to appropriate resources.*

This change is a crucial component of the shift of emphasis for the adviser-advisee relationship, and removes the incentive for both parties to focus on a transaction linked to course selection.

4. *We recommend that the pool of potential college advisers be expanded to include suitable non-ladder faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and staff advisers, extending reasonable dining privileges to advisers as an incentive to participate in college advising.*

With the student body increasing by one-sixth over the next five years and residential colleges reporting occasional difficulty finding enough advisers as it is, the pool of eligible advisers simply must be expanded. The committee felt that non-ladder faculty (particularly in the languages and writing courses) and postdoctoral fellows (across disciplines, but most urgently in the sciences) would make excellent advisers. We considered including FAS graduate students in this group as well, but we felt that this would introduce too many complications when it comes to recruitment, assessment, and supervision. An important implementation question will concern how newly recruited advisers from this pool will be connected to residential colleges: we suggest a category of “advising fellows” for those not otherwise eligible for appointment as residential college fellows. Another complication is recruiting advisers to do unpaid work. While we reaffirm that serving as a college adviser should be voluntary and unpaid, we believe that some sort of tangible benefit would help with recruitment of non-ladder faculty advisers. Currently advisers who do not have faculty lunch privileges receive three lunch passes per advisee. We recommend investigating the extension of faculty lunch privileges to all college advisers, which might encourage advisers to have meals more frequently with their advisees. Indeed, we think a system that supports regular lunches, without any particular business to transact, would do much to encourage more holistic advising.

Enhancing Access to Academic Advice

5. *We recommend that the Yale College Dean's Office coordinate with the University Registrar's Office to develop a centralized resource for students to find information they need as they contemplate their course schedules in relation to various majors and other courses of study.*

This information, which will help students “self-advise” about a wide variety of academic questions, is currently scattered among the Yale College Programs of Study, departmental websites, Academic Fair handouts, and word of mouth. We recommend that Yale develop a resource comparable to Brown's Focal Point website¹ or to UC–Berkeley's Academic Guide.² We have learned from the University Registrar that such a resource could be built on top of CourseLeaf with tools currently under development by the vendor. We recommend that responsibility for the content of this resource be centered in the YCDO (or shared with the URO), where the responsible administrator will work with departments and students to ensure that information is up to date and presented in a consistent and student-centered form.

6. *We recommend that the Yale College Dean's Office work with the DUSes of STEM majors to create a peer advising program that would match freshmen interested in STEM with junior and senior STEM majors who can provide academic advice during course selection period.*

This will help to ensure that freshmen are getting timely and personalized advice about the selection of introductory courses and prerequisites.

7. *We recommend that the Yale College Dean's Office work with DUSes of departments and programs with large freshman enrollments or complex placement procedures to ensure that freshmen are receiving accurate information during orientation through strategically scheduled and well-publicized information sessions, or through easily accessible and closely monitored electronic platforms (e.g., a dedicated email address).*

The Academic Fair that takes place during orientation is intended to connect students with representatives of the various programs of study, but it can be overwhelming for students and faculty alike. We considered some ways to improve the Academic Fair itself, but determined that the design of the event has little room for improvement given constraints of space, time, and personnel. We have therefore recommended these two supplementary ways to improve information flow between DUSes and freshmen.

A Choice of Structures for Pre-Major Academic Advising

We began this report by reaffirming that the freshman advising relationship should be based in the residential colleges. However, we feel it proper for the Dean of Yale College to make the deci-

¹ <https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/concentrations/>

² <http://guide.berkeley.edu/>

sion whether (a) to allow residential college masters and deans to continue to determine the details of the advising program as best suits their local practices, or (b) to centralize administration of the college-adviser program in the YCDO.

If a more centralized model is chosen, we make the following recommendations for implementation. If residential colleges retain responsibility for running their own college advising programs, these recommendations might be offered to colleges as best practices for college advising.

8. *We recommend that the timeline for college advisers' meetings with freshmen be changed. The initial group meeting should continue to take place the day before classes begin, but subsequent individual meetings should be spaced out over the semester; we recommend that advisees meet with advisers at least twice more during the first term.*

Such a modified timeline, with an emphasis on early and ongoing advising, will allow for increased holistic conversation and opportunities for freshmen to reflect on the transition to Yale.

9. *We recommend that college adviser-advisee groups be aligned with freshman counselor groups.*

We feel that this alignment would enhance freshmen's sense of an advising team, particularly if the first meeting in the fall included freshman counselors and advisers meeting together with freshmen.

10. *We recommend that shared academic interests be one among many considerations used to match advisers with advisees.*

Routinely matching students with faculty who are specialized in an area overlapping with (or, worse, adjacent to) one of the student's self-reported interests gives a false impression that the advising relationship is primarily about course selection.

11. *We recommend that some system of documentation be implemented to ensure that college adviser-advisee meetings are taking place.*

This should not be tied to the course schedule as it is now, but members of the committee feel that steps should be taken to make sure that advisers and advisees maintain a relationship through the first year. This might be accomplished by a simple self-report by college advisers and/or advisees, or by some system connected to a dining privilege, such as the Graduate School's FEAST for Teaching and Meals for Mentorship programs.

APPENDIX

ACADEMIC ADVISING AND THE NEW RESIDENTIAL COLLEGES

(The “Working Group Memo”)

Academic advising plays a critical role in helping students to determine their academic goals and in guiding them to the resources and experiences they need to accomplish those goals. Yet providing meaningful and reliable academic advice is an ongoing challenge at Yale, as it is at many colleges and universities. Yale has many enviable advantages, including a residential college system and an historic commitment to undergraduate teaching among the faculty, but students and faculty often point to shortcomings in our advising structure. The new colleges provide an occasion to redefine the goals of advising and reaffirm Yale’s commitment to advising. They also provide a new opportunity – a laboratory of sorts – to experiment with new models, especially for pre-major advising. What follows is an overview of our current advising structure and an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses improvements.

Academic Advising in Yale College: An Overview

Academic advising at Yale revolves primarily around two poles: a student’s residential college and a student’s academic department. The former is designed to be broad, holistic, and longitudinal; the latter is typically more specific, academic, and episodic, though it is also often deeply personal and transformative. The two are distinct, but they are complementary and overlapping. In the pre-major years, especially freshman year, advisers connected to the student’s residential college play a central role. In subsequent years, especially as a student selects a major and eventually works on a senior project, faculty within the student’s chosen field of study also have critical influence. In addition, other offices at Yale, such as the Center for International and Professional Experience, provide important academic advice.

The Freshman Year

All freshmen at Yale are assigned to a residential college before matriculation. The average size of a freshman class in each college is 112 (the current range is 97–123 freshmen per college). In each college, a residential dean oversees advising activities and serves as the general academic adviser for all students in the college across all four years. Each dean supervises the work of a team of freshman counselors (seniors who live in the freshman entryways) and assigns each freshman to a freshman adviser (faculty and staff who are members of the college’s fellowship). The freshman counselor-to-student ratio averages 15:1 in most colleges (8:1 in Timothy Dwight and Silliman). The freshman adviser-to-student ratio ranges widely from 8:1 to 1:1, but the modal average is 3:1. In compensation for their service, freshman counselors receive a waiver on their room and partial board costs; freshman advisers are volunteers.

In each of the departments and programs, Directors of Undergraduate Studies prepare printed and online materials about their curriculum and major, oversee placement procedures as appropriate, and host advising meetings specifically for freshmen. (There are currently 78 majors offered in the College.) Most of these activities take place during a five-day Freshman Orientation period, which includes an Academic Fair, at which all departments and programs are represented. In addition, advising staff in a variety of other offices on campus provide information and support for freshmen with particular academic interests (e.g., premedical requirements or study abroad).

Although freshman advising is understood to be a year-round activity, special attention is given at the beginning of each term and particularly at the beginning of the academic year. At the start of each term, college deans meet with their freshmen, and all freshmen are required to meet individually with their freshman counselor and freshman adviser during the course selection period (“shopping period”). Evidence of this consultation is demonstrated by the signature of both the freshman counselor and freshman adviser on the student’s finalized schedule. The college deans also review and approve all freshman course schedules before they are entered into the Registrar’s database.

Evaluation

Strengths. The college system provides an organic and integrated context for freshman academic advising, particularly about general matters. The college dean welcomes a new class of students every year, is able to offer general guidance about course selection, and is readily available for individual consultation. He or she has an apartment and office within the residential college and has office hours every weekday. The dean also works very closely with the team of freshman counselors from the college—often students whom the dean has known for 3 years—who in turn have frequent (often daily) contact with their freshman counselees. The counselors are carefully selected and trained, and they meet with the college dean weekly. The dean recruits freshman advisers from the college’s fellowship, and the multi-year relationship that develops between deans and advisers helps with recruitment and communication. Moreover, the college master is often actively involved with getting to know students and is critically important in supporting the network of freshman advisers in the college’s fellowship.

Challenges. The first and biggest challenge is that this model depends upon volunteer freshman advisers whose service is not recognized or rewarded, is often viewed as a distraction from other responsibilities, and is not carefully evaluated. The 2010 “Report on Advising” from the Committee on Teaching, Learning, and Advising recommended ways to make freshman advising more prominent, but this remains a struggle. Beyond difficulties with recruitment, there are limits to how much time advisers can be reasonably expected to devote to training and meeting students. Currently, the Dean’s Office runs one-hour orientation meetings for all new advisers, and the dean in each college holds an additional one-hour meeting for all advisers in the college, but much more could and should be done. The decentralized model through the colleges helps the deans with recruitment and communication, but there is inevitable loss of consistency in training many advisers (currently 486 of them) by 12 different deans across 12 colleges.

A second challenge is that this advising model currently draws upon the fellows in the college, only a subset of whom are suitable and willing to serve as a freshman adviser. As a con-

sequence, there are significant gender imbalances and uneven distributions of academic fields among the advisers in some of the colleges. There are other potential freshman advisers on campus—including non-ladder faculty, advanced graduate students, and some M&P academic staff—who would be capable advisers, available for substantial training, and willing to devote the time required, but many of them are currently ineligible to serve as advisers because they are not fellows of a college.

A third challenge is overcoming the artificial nature of an advising relationship that is disconnected from the kinds of regular contact that deans, freshman counselors, and instructors routinely have with their students. Freshman advisers meet their advisees at the beginning of the term during shopping period, but during the term there are few explicit appointments when an adviser and advisee should meet. This contributes to the notion of “transactional” advising, which has its goal securing a signature instead of having a conversation. Some of the more attentive and proactive advisers succeed in establishing a regular meeting pattern and a meaningful relationship, but that is not the rule. In part, the lack of contact is an inadvertent by-product of the success of other aspects of the advising system: the resident dean and the team of freshman counselors in each college deal with the majority of concerns that a student might have in a way that is more convenient and natural. But there are also few expectations that advisers and advisees meet during the term, and the infrequent contact inhibits effectiveness.

A fourth challenge is serving students who need specific advice about course placement or prerequisites for a course or a major, particularly in the STEM fields. These students should go to the relevant department, but easy access to personalized advice is limited, especially in large departments, and freshmen often hesitate to make that connection. Whatever the size of the department or program, each major has only one Director of Undergraduate Studies responsible for overseeing the undergraduate curriculum and advising of the major. In recent years, we have developed better instruments for placing incoming students in subjects where there are multiple entry points (such as the natural sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages), but the process is still relatively crude and cumbersome. Many of these processes also take place only during a tightly compressed freshman orientation period, which leaves little time for adjustments. We need a more sophisticated process for placing students over the summer before they arrive and an advising system that provides these students with personalized guidance.

A fifth challenge is serving students who face significant cultural adjustments in coming to Yale or who have relatively weak academic preparation, particularly if their plans require courses with substantial quantitative components. They need a skilled and solicitous adviser to acclimate them to Yale and to guide them through the course selection process and accessing the array of resources at Yale, especially if they have substantial other commitments, such as varsity athletics. In recent years, we have matched these students with our most accessible and attentive advisers, and this strategy has been helpful, but we could do more. The initial success of Freshman Scholars at Yale (FSY) and Online Experiences for Yale Scholars (ONEXYS) is very encouraging, and it underscores the need for specialized advising, tutoring, and workshops that could take place during the academic year if staff support were available.

Academic Advising in the Sophomore Year

At the end of their first year, each freshman must select a faculty member to serve as his or her Sophomore Year Adviser. We encourage students to select a faculty member who may have taught the student in a small class or one with a shared academic or other interest. We also encourage students to seek faculty advisers in a prospective major, especially if they are planning to major in the natural sciences or engineering, though selecting a Sophomore Year Adviser is not equivalent to selecting a major. College deans are available to assist freshmen with their selection, and some majors also assist with this choice through the DUS office.

During the sophomore year, college deans hold a sophomore advising fair, usually in the fall, to give general advice to sophomores about selecting majors and to remind students about resources on campus, such as the Center for International and Professional Experience. In addition, many departments and programs offer information sessions geared for students who are investigating possible majors, most of whom are sophomores. A dedicated web site for sophomores was created a few years ago, which students and sophomore advisers can consult as needed. Especially useful on the site are advice to sophomore advisers, a sophomore year calendar, and a list of departmental information meetings about majors.

At the end of the sophomore year, each sophomore must meet with a faculty member, ideally in a proposed major, to prepare a tentative program of study for the remaining two years of study. All students are expected to declare a major no later than the beginning of the junior year; those in engineering and the sciences often declare during the sophomore year.

Evaluation

Strengths. Increased attention in recent years to making the transition from a freshman adviser to a sophomore adviser, and then to finding an adviser in an intended major, has helped to prompt students to take a more proactive role in the advising process and has helped to foster advising relationships with faculty. The recent development of a web portal for freshman and sophomore advisers has greatly eased access to information for advisers about their advisees, including grades and other information.

Challenges. Many of the challenges noted above for freshman advising apply to sophomore advising as well. The contact can be superficial, and for research faculty with many other responsibilities, advising is simply not a priority. Sophomores frequently report feeling lost in between the supportive freedom of freshman year and the non-yet-determined academic home of a major. They feel the pressure to settle on a major, but uncertainty abounds, and personalized information from departments can be difficult for students to access. Greater efforts to encourage departments to offer information meetings about their majors have led to an increase in these meetings, but they are infrequent and irregular. Sophomores learn about the meetings from their residential college deans and the Sophomore Web site, but perhaps something like “Sophomore Advising Month” (in October or February) would increase the draw and give these meetings more focus and better attendance.

Advising in the Major

All majors have a Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) who oversees the undergraduate curriculum and advising in the department or program. In some larger departments, the DUS is assisted by an Associate DUS or by several faculty colleagues who advise a subset of majors (e.g., by academic subfield, by class year, or by residential college). In most majors, students also select a faculty member to advise their senior essay or project, either independently or within the context of a senior seminar. Many students develop a close relationship with this faculty member who provides mentoring and advice, not only about academic issues, but also often about other matters, such as summer opportunities and career advice.

Evaluation

Strengths. In many majors, there is a culture of strong DUS leadership, and in small to mid-sized majors, the DUS is often able to have substantial advising relationships with students. Students within these majors frequently report that they feel well informed and supported. In larger majors, some departments and programs have been successful in distributing the advising load to include other members of the faculty, or benefit from highly competent and experienced academic support staff, but this is not uniform. Advising within the context of a senior essay or project also receives high praise from many students, many of whom work closely with a faculty member and profit from their mentorship across a range of matters.

Challenges. Though all majors have a DUS, the number of declared junior and senior majors can range from less than a handful of students in the smallest programs, to over 350 students in the largest. As a consequence, the duties of a DUS vary greatly across majors. In smaller departments and programs, the DUS often meets individually with every major at the beginning of each term, and again throughout the term. In larger departments, this practice is impossible for a single DUS. In some large departments, the DUS shares the advising load with others, but this practice is uneven in implementation and effectiveness. The Internet and social media create new possibilities for communicating information and interacting with students, but the sophistication of these resources varies widely across programs and depends largely upon the technical abilities of an individual DUS, department registrar, or DUS assistant.

Another challenge for departments and programs is providing continuity when the department's DUS changes, which can be frequent. In many departments and programs, the DUS serves only one year because of leave schedules or other administrative responsibilities. It is also not uncommon to have a change in the DUS in the middle of an academic year. As a consequence, some students have 3 or 4 different DUSes during their Yale careers. Interdisciplinary programs also face particular challenges because they draw their DUSes from several participating departments, each of which has its own administrative needs that often take precedence. To find a DUS, some programs must turn to non-ladder faculty members, and in some cases visiting faculty perform this role temporarily. Such lack of continuity impedes meaningful advising relationships, curriculum development, and long-range planning. Many DUSes also report receiving little training from their predecessor, and just when they have learned the job well enough to make improvements, a new DUS comes on board. Meanwhile, students often report being con-

fused about who their departmental adviser is, and some complain that arrangements approved by one DUS are not understood or honored by a subsequent DUS.