Advising

The Advising of Majors

The DUS establishes and oversees the department’s advising system. This is one of your most important jobs, and your level of commitment will have a profound impact on the majors in your department. It is also one of your more demanding jobs. In fact, the more majors a department has, the more assistance you will need from colleagues.

A major advising system should achieve the following three goals:

1. that students in the major and students contemplating the major receive full information about the department’s offerings;
2. that they receive advice that takes into account their special interests and individual abilities; and
3. that they meet with their advisers frequently enough to accomplish the first two objectives.

An individualized advising system is normally easy to establish in smaller departments, and more challenging in a larger ones. An arrangement that some larger departments have found successful is that of appointing departmental representatives in the residential colleges. By this scheme, you designate as your representative in each of the fourteen residential colleges a member of the fellowship who is also a departmental colleague. This departmental representative advises undergraduate majors in the college and reviews their course schedules at the beginning of each term. If a college does not have in its fellowship a member of the departmental faculty who is available for advising, you should not hesitate to recommend to the head of the college the name of a colleague who would be a good adviser. A new member of the full-time faculty is eligible to be elected to a college fellowship after one term of teaching at Yale.

If yours is a smaller department but your number of majors is still such that one person would find advising all majors challenging, you may find it convenient to recruit some faculty members to assist you as departmental advisers.

If you delegate to departmental advisers the responsibility of reviewing course schedules, you should keep in mind that you have made them partners in the job of enforcing the requirements of the major. Make certain that they are thoroughly conversant with these requirements and keep them informed of changes in the undergraduate curriculum. You can also ask the Registrar’s Office to grant these advisers access to the Degree Audits of the majors. While advising meetings are expected, the course schedule does not require the signature of the DUS or adviser.

The members of your department’s Student Advisory Committee might also play a role as peer advisers. Such peer advisers often prove to be most useful for giving fellow students a sense of the experience of majoring in your field and practical advice on navigating the requirements and electives in your department or program. In no case may peer advisers review course schedules for the term, authorize waivers or other exceptions, or officially assess progress towards completion of the major. In addition, they are unpaid. Peer advisers may make themselves available through email, informal meetings, or drop-in hours in a departmental lounge or other suitable space. Many
DUSes invite their Student Advisory Committee members to accompany them to the fall Academic Fair.

Pamela Schirmeister (pamela.schirmeister@yale.edu), senior associate dean and dean of Undergraduate Education, can provide you with a template for establishing a peer adviser system.

THE ADVISING OF NON-MAJORS

The DUS and the departmental advisers have the important and substantial task of advising interested non-majors, especially first-year students and sophomores, about the department’s courses and programs. Many departments have developed systematic methods for such advising, such as holding a meeting at the beginning of the fall or spring term for students tentatively interested in entering the major; in others, the DUS and departmental representatives respond to the initiative of individual students who make inquiries. All DUSes are encouraged to participate in the Academic Fair, run by the Office of Undergraduate Education and held annually immediately before the first day of fall classes. First-year and other incoming students, such as transfer students and Eli Whitney (non-traditional) students, are directed by their residential college deans to attend the Academic Fair to learn about Yale’s subject offerings and seek answers to questions about placement, preregistration, and major requirements.

First-year students are advised by college advisers (faculty and staff) drawn from the fellowships of their residential colleges. These advisers are assigned by the dean of the residential college and are charged with holistic advising. It is expected that specific course- and major-related advising will come from the departments themselves, often from the DUSes. Thus, you may expect questions at the beginning of the fall and spring terms from college advisers and from first-year or other incoming students themselves; their questions about the department’s course offerings will frequently concern matters of placement. DUSes, especially those in larger departments, are encouraged to hold enhanced office hours during the week immediately preceding and immediately following the beginning of the fall term.

First-year and other incoming students are also encouraged to consult departmental advisers, if your program has them, about any matter connected with the department’s courses or programs. You should make certain, therefore, that all departmental advisers are thoroughly conversant with your department’s curriculum.

A good resource for non-majors and majors alike is the 2015 Yale College Dean’s Office report, “Goals for All Yale College Majors.” The goals listed for your department may help you present your department’s curriculum and objectives to potential interested students. Many departments have created “roadmaps,” or visual representations indicating how students go through those majors. Many majors offer multiple paths, and the roadmaps are designed to facilitate comparison. They are also visually uniform so that students may easily compare one major with another at a glance. If your department has not prepared a roadmap but seeks to do so, contact Beth Baumgartel (beth.baumgartel@yale.edu), Registrar’s Office.

You can also encourage non-majors to use the “What If” function in Degree Audit, which allows them to see how their audit would appear if they were to declare any major (or add a second major).
In any given term, there will be peaks and valleys in the satisfaction obtained and time commitment required by advising. For the most part, you and your departmental advisers should plan on responding to a number of inquiries from, or on behalf of, first-year students, sophomores, and incoming transfer students and Eli Whitney students at the beginning of a term and at the time when those students begin to select a major. It is often helpful to offer expanded office hours during those times.

Questions about college advising should be directed to Risa Sodi (risa.sodi@yale.edu), assistant dean of Yale College and director of Advising and Special Programs.

DEGREE AUDIT
If you or your department administrator is new to Degree Audit, you are encouraged to schedule an appointment with Daria Vander Veer (dariavanderveer@yale.edu) in the University Registrar’s Office for an orientation. Degree Audit provides students, advisers, and deans with a dynamic tool showing a student’s progress toward fulfillment of Yale College requirements, including major requirements. Degree Audit also offers exploration features for non-majors considering your major, and you can record special permissions and waivers directly into the audit, eliminating the need for cumbersome paper-based tracking systems.