

STUDENT ADVISORY COMMITTEES

In most departments, the DUS organizes and chairs an advisory committee that includes students and that meets at regular intervals during the year to review aspects of the department's undergraduate curriculum as it affects both majors and non-majors. If you are not the chair of this committee, you are an important member of it. The functions of the departmental student advisory committee vary somewhat from department to department, but every department must have such a committee, and typically the committee advises the department on such matters as ideas for new courses and programs, the improvement of instruction or advising in the department, and proposed changes in the requirements of the major. Although its composition and size also vary, the committee normally includes both senior and junior members of the faculty as well as undergraduates. It is advisable, particularly in large departments, for the undergraduates to be drawn both from majors and from non-majors. Through this committee, and through contact with individual students, with the chair, and with departmental colleagues, the DUS is in a unique position to formulate both short-range and long-range plans for the curriculum.

Many programs also train a corps of peer advisers. In no case do these peer liaisons displace the DUS or their faculty colleagues as the official advisers for students in the major. They cannot, in particular, review course schedules for the term, authorize waivers or other exceptions, or officially assess progress toward completion of the major. They are expected to be most useful for giving fellow students a sense of the experience of majoring in a particular field and practical advice on navigating the requirements and electives in a department or program. In many cases, a DUS who chooses to exercise this option might wish to combine the function of the Department Student Advisory Committee with this peer advising initiative. It is up to the DUS to select and make known the names of department peer liaisons. Department peer liaisons are unpaid; they may make themselves available through email, informal meetings, or "office hours" in a departmental lounge or other suitable space. The Dean of Undergraduate Education (pamela.schirmeister@yale.edu) can provide departments with a template for establishing a peer liaison program.