

## Memo

**From:** Advising Task Force  
**To:** Members of the Faculty  
**Date:** May, 2008  
**Re:** **Attached Draft of Advising Plan<sup>1</sup>**

The attached document is meant to provide suggestions for the types of conversations that advisers might initiate with their advisees (both premajor and major advisees), based on written student reflections. We imagine a small pilot project for the Fall semester, with premajor and major advisers invited to participate by the Class Deans. As part of the pilot project, advisers would be free to choose some subset of the written reflection questions to administer to their advisees, and assess the usefulness of this approach. Ultimately, we imagine the current list of possible advising reflection questions serving as the source for an eventual e-portfolio system where advisees respond to prompts electronically before meeting with their advisers. Data from the pilot project would be used to narrow down the list of prompts to roughly three per session.

**The Advising Reflection Questions that we think might be most helpful to advisers can be found starting on page two.**

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the attached document is derived from the work of the Advising Task Force during the 2007-08 Academic Year. It also draws heavily on UPenn's "Prompt Questions for the Academic Blog," as well as some of Dartmouth's questions to incoming first year students.

## Advising Plan

May, 2008

### Advising Goals

The goals of a successful advising relationship should be to provide opportunities for structured reflection and discussion about students' curricular and co-curricular choices and goals, and to increase the sense of community and connection between advisers and advisees. What follows are suggestions for how to structure your advising meetings to achieve these goals. Advising meetings can be done both individually and in groups, with venues that include lunch or dinner meetings on or off campus; meetings in the houses (e.g. teas); meetings and/or meals at advisers' houses; picnics; hikes; cultural outings relevant to a discussion topic, common readings, or other shared experiences. Limited funds are available to support these activities through the Class Deans.

**Motivation** (Light, Richard. Making the Most of College. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

"Agreement is widespread that academic advising is important. There is also agreement that the best advising is tailored to each undergraduate's unique situation – his or her particular background, strengths, areas that need improvement, and hopes and dreams" (85).

"When we asked students to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, four-fifths of them chose a situation or event outside of the classroom" (8).

"Those students who make connections between what goes on inside and outside the classroom report a more satisfying college experience" (14).

"They [Rhodes and Marshall Scholars] say that at key points in their college years, an academic advisor asked questions, or posed a challenge, that forced them to *think about the relationship of their academic work to their personal lives*" (88).

**A primary goal for advisers should thus be to get to know all advisees as multifaceted people, to engage with them in matters central to a liberal arts education, and to help them make sound curricular, co-curricular, and professional decisions.**

### Orientation Meetings:

Orientation meeting with the premajor advising group: a discussion of expectations

What are your advisees' expectations of you as an adviser? Of themselves as advisees? Have advisees describe some of the characteristics that they would like to see in you as a premajor adviser and in your relationship with them as individuals and as a group - are these realistic? The adviser's expectations should also be discussed. Develop an advising contract. How many hours per semester will you meet with each advisee? What is a reasonable response time for email inquiries or phone calls (to advisees and to advisers)? Will advising meetings always be one-on-one, or will there be group meetings? What will that balance be?

Individual course selection meetings:

Discuss the written responses to the Advising Reflection Questions (see attached document). Give out code. Each student subsequently registers on her own.

## **DRAFT ADVISING REFLECTION QUESTIONS (answered in writing in advance)**

### **Summer Before Arriving at Smith:**

1. What question about the world would you most like to have the opportunity to explore, either inside or outside the classroom? What specific resources at Smith might you use to explore this question?
2. Why did you decide to go to College? Why Smith? What are your expectations for College vs High School?
3. What are you good at? What things/skills/ways of being come naturally to you? Which ones do you struggle with?
4. What are you afraid of? Are there things that you try not to engage in because of how they might turn out?
5. What are some of the different aspects of your identity? How do these aspects shape you in terms of your goals for your time at Smith, why you are here, and what you hope to become and do?
6. If you were to write a one paragraph biography of yourself in ten years, what would it say?

### **Orientation Week (before advising group and individual meetings occur)**

1. What are your interests and goals, both academic and non-academic? At this point in time, what is the most important goal you have for your four years at Smith?
2. How do the choices you will be making for this semester develop your interests and help you make progress towards your goals?
3. What are your expectations of your adviser? Of yourself as an advisee?

### **1<sup>st</sup> Year – NOVEMBER -**

1. What experience at Smith so far has had the strongest effect on you?
2. In what ways have your expectations for this first semester (and College in general) been challenged or confirmed? Explain. How are you responding?
3. In light of these experiences and expectations, what new ideas, concepts, problems, or issues have interested you?
4. What strategies and/or supports are you using to find balance at Smith?
5. What organizations or activities have you become involved in? Why? Do you feel you are becoming connected to the Smith community?
6. What are your plans for the summer? How will these experiences help you progress towards your goals?

### **1<sup>st</sup> Year – APRIL -**

1. What have you learned about yourself this year that has surprised you?
2. What has been your favorite class so far? Why?
3. How have your interests and goals, both academic and non-academic, evolved since last semester?
4. How have your curricular and co-curricular choices helped develop your interests and helped you make progress towards achieving your goals?
5. How do the courses you are choosing build on past work that you have done?
6. How have your notions of diversity been challenged or shaped in your first year?

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Year – NOVEMBER -**

1. What did you do this past summer? In what ways did your summer activities help to develop your interests and/or help you make progress towards your goals?
2. If you had to choose a major today, what would it be? Why?
3. How does this major build on your strengths? How has your sense of your strengths and weaknesses changed or been confirmed since high school?
4. Do study abroad, internships, and/or research figure into your plans? If so, why and how?
5. How is sophomore year different than first year? In what ways have your expectations for sophomore year been challenged or confirmed? Explain.
6. The course bulletin lists a set of capacities that each student should develop before graduation. These include developing the ability to think critically and to convey knowledge and understanding; developing a historical and comparative perspective; and becoming an informed global citizen. What do you interpret these capacities to mean? Are they important to you as an individual? How might you go about developing them? What other capacities can you identify at this point in time, which are not reflected in the College's list? Why are they important to you? How might you go about developing them for yourself?
7. What are your plans for the summer? How will these experiences help you progress towards your current goals and prepare you for your time after Smith?

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Year – APRIL -**

1. What personal, social, or intellectual questions do you hope your major studies will help you answer or better understand?
2. What do you hope to accomplish in this academic discipline?
3. How do such opportunities as study abroad, internships/PRAXIS, and/or research figure into your plans? How do they connect to your academic interests? If they don't, what value do you believe they bring to your academic endeavors?
4. How have your interests and goals, both academic and non-academic, evolved since last semester?
5. How have your curricular and co-curricular choices helped develop your interests and helped you make progress towards achieving your goals?
6. How do the courses you are choosing build on past work that you have done?
7. Are there specific opportunities for intellectual engagement that you would like to take advantage of, but haven't? (e.g. Kahn Institute, Sophia Smith Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Art Museum, Botanic Gardens, Smith Centers for Societal Leadership and Engagement, Poetry Center, etc...). What has stopped you?
8. Are there specific co-curricular opportunities that you would like to take advantage of that you haven't? (e.g. volunteer work, student organizations, athletics, work study, PRAXIS, Women and Financial Independence, Center for Work and Life, etc...). What has stopped you?

### **3<sup>d</sup> Year –**

1. In what ways have your expectations for your major been confirmed and/or challenged? Explain. How are you responding?
2. What has your growing experience in your major meant for your intellectual identity? How has it affected your plans for your life after Smith?
3. What other areas of intellectual interest would you like to explore before you graduate?
4. When you imagine life after Smith, in what ways do you feel prepared? In what ways do you not feel prepared? What can you do in the coming year to help you feel more prepared?
5. Before you arrived at Smith you wrote a brief biography of yourself in ten years. What has changed? If you were to re-write it today, what would it say?
6. What are your plans for the summer? How will these experiences help you progress towards your current goals and prepare you for your time after Smith?

### **4<sup>th</sup> Year – NOVEMBER -**

1. What did you do this past summer? In what ways did your summer activities help to develop your interests and/or help you make progress towards your goals?
2. What are your goals and expectations for your senior year? Is there any course or particular curricular or co-curricular activity that you have always wanted to do, but haven't?
3. How do the courses you are choosing build on past work that you have done, particularly with respect to study abroad, internships, and/or independent research work?

### **4<sup>th</sup> Year – APRIL -**

1. If you had the chance to go through College at Smith again, what would you do differently? What would remain unchanged? Why?
2. What advice would you give to incoming first years?
3. What was your most meaningful intellectual experience at Smith? Explain.
4. What are your plans for next year? Five years from now?
5. As you consider your first year away from Smith, what excites you the most? What concerns you the most about the year ahead? What do you need to help you successfully transition into the next step in your life after Smith?

## Possible Discussion Topics for Group and/or Individual Advising Meetings

### Year 1

- The Big Picture: What does it mean to be “an educated person”? Is this a personal decision, or are there societal or cultural norms? What factors influence those norms?
- Learning Styles, Self Assessment, and Support Services: What kind of a learner are you? How do you develop an awareness of your strengths and weaknesses as a learner? What types of support services are there for different types of concerns or problems that you might be having, and how do you know when to ask for help?
- Curricular opportunities: First-year seminars, Latin Honors, J-term, Certificate programs, the Five College Consortium
- Intellectual engagement in a liberal arts context: Kahn Institute, Sophia Smith Collection, Mortimer Rare Book Room, Art Museum, Botanic Gardens, Smith Centers for Societal Leadership and Engagement, Poetry Center, lectures and symposia
- Co-curricular opportunities: Volunteering, student organizations, athletics, work study, PRAXIS, Women and Financial Independence, Center for Work and Life
- The Seven Sisters: what does Smith’s identity as a women’s college mean to you as an individual? What are the perceived ramifications of that identity for you as an individual?
- Developing ‘balance’ in your life: what does ‘balance’ mean, is it attainable, and is it important? What does it mean to have a life well-lived?

### Year 2

- Orientation meeting with the premajor advising group: a discussion of expectations: How is sophomore year different than first year? As a sophomore, what are your expectations of your adviser, and have they changed? Of yourself as an advisee? Describe some of the characteristics that you would like to see in your premajor adviser now and in your relationship with that individual and this group. Are these realistic? The adviser’s expectations should also be discussed. Develop a revised advising contract.
- Individual course selection meetings: Discuss the written response to the Advising Reflection Questions (see attached document). Give out code. Each student subsequently registers on her own.
- Making choices: These discussions would focus on the opportunities and challenges involved in making choices, and how to make those choices intentionally and intelligently. Topics could include the major; the minor; independent work and study plans (research opportunities, independently designed majors, etc...); internships; study abroad; summer employment.
- Transitioning to the Major: Consider incorporating a peer-advising session with premajor advisees and selected major advisees. Discuss process and etiquette for securing a major adviser. Develop a “plan for the major.” Section 72(f) of the Faculty Code states that “each student is required to submit to her major adviser during the second semester of her sophomore year a written plan for the final two years, including a statement of the objectives that determined the plan, a tentative list of courses to be taken both inside and outside the major, and a tentative specification of how the other requirements for the major will be met.”