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Re: Reflection, Writing, and Advising

Dear President Christ and the Strategic Planning Committee:

At the Strategic Planning Conversations, I heard articulated two concerns regarding advising that I think are linked and could be easily remedied through brief, unobtrusive written reflections. These reflections would greatly enhance the advising process and benefit both students and faculty.

1. One concern was that students do not reflect enough on the courses they take. Advising too often becomes a matter of "finding the course that fits my schedule."
2. Another concern was the transition from pre-major to major advising is not always smooth, the major advisor too often having no idea about what went on in the advising process during a student's first two years.

What I propose is that every student go to her first advising session with a 1-page written reflection on two simple questions:

1. What are my academic interests and goals?
2. How do the courses I have chosen develop my interests and help me achieve my goals?

Thereafter, each student will answer three simple questions in 1-2 pages:

1. What are my academic interests and goals? (If they have changed since last semester, explain briefly.)
2. How do the courses I have chosen develop my interests and help me achieve my goals?
3. How do they build on past work I have done?

We can tinker with the questions, but I believe that simple written reflections of this type will contribute much to the development of a student's intentionality and help her and her advisor have more meaningful and substantive advising sessions. Additionally, the brief written record documenting the development of the student's interests, goals, and work will at once give advisors in the major a strong sense of the student and her developmental trajectory in her first two years.