

Proposal for a new "Advising Team" approach

This proposal originates from the belief that the current structure of advising- a premajor advisor, followed by a major advisor—may not be giving our students the full benefit of the resources available at Smith, nor preparing them optimally for the world after graduation.

Instead of a succession of individuals meant to provide academic advice, we propose an advising team approach to the problem. This team would be flexible in its composition, and would change to accommodate a student's stated interests, but would initially include:

- A faculty member in the student's stated area of initial interest
- A faculty member outside of the area of interest (or in a "second interest" area specified in the application)
- An upper division student in the department of stated interest

Upon declaration of major (or when student's interests began to be clear), the team would be supplemented with:

- An alumnae mentor/liaison in a professional area linked to the student's interest. This pairing would be particularly important, as it would provide students with a professional perspective on the important areas of preparation, and would also initiate students to the networking skills that a Smith degree makes possible.

This team would be charged with bringing coherence to the student's academic career by providing her with both insider and outsider perspectives on the various disciplines. In addition, this arrangement would bring the world of the classroom and outside world a bit closer together. Finally, this mechanism would remove some of the haphazard advising that occasionally takes place as a function of the limited knowledge an individual faculty member has with the offerings outside his/her own discipline. Much of this team advising could take advantage of the communication technologies available today, from e-mail to videoconferencing- and need not be thought of as a vast scheduling nightmare. Coupled with a concerted effort to identify coherent trajectories of study both within and outside the major, this should result in a far richer advising experience for our students.

Rob Dorit
Biology