



Yale College Council
Proposal for a Department Ambassador
Program

January 2013

Introduction & Survey Demographics

The Yale College Council recommends the formation of a Student Ambassador Program to improve academic advising, in which selected upperclassmen will serve as a resource to advise freshmen and sophomores on different majors. Although freshmen have academic advisors, freshmen counselors, residential college deans, and Directors of Undergraduate Studies to assist them in choosing a major, in fall of 2013 it was brought to the YCC’s attention that some students felt poorly advised on major requirements, prerequisites, and differences between majors. YCC administered a survey on various academic issues to 1,602 freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, between November 26 and December 8,¹ and has compiled its findings on academic advising at Yale and on the need for a Department Ambassador Program into this report. Respondents to the survey were evenly distributed by year and field of study.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	2014		324	20%
2	2015		410	26%
3	2016		410	26%
4	2017		458	29%
	Total		1,602	100%

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Humanities		567	37%
2	STEM		649	43%
3	Social Sciences		656	43%

¹ Survey questions developed with input from the Office of Institutional Research.

Current Situation

Many students have expressed frustration with the status quo, as academic advisors are randomly assigned to freshmen, often having little knowledge of the various majors, especially ones from other departments. Some underclassmen find themselves approaching upperclassmen with their questions, as older students can offer practical advice that professors might not have the knowledge or time to provide.

Q: Do you feel you were/are adequately informed to make a decision about which series of classes you should take for your prospective major(s)?

Answer	Response	%
Definitely	330	23%
Probably	686	48%
Probably Not	322	23%
Definitely Not	83	6%
Total	1,421	100%

- A survey conducted on undergraduates found that only 23% of students (330/1421) feel they were/are definitely adequately informed about their prospective majors.

Additional student feedback on the survey indicated dissatisfaction with the present state of advising, particularly freshmen advising. One student mentioned that his advisor was from the Theater Studies department, yet couldn't provide advice about theater classes because the advisor "didn't really know what [was being] offered." Additionally, many students pursuing popular majors often wait in long lines to speak with their DUS during office hours. Below are some select student responses.

- “better freshman advising! right now it really sucks.”
- “Matching advisors to freshmen's planned careers”
- “Better matching of advisors with interests”
- “I feel academic advisors are really a crapshoot and I apparently have not had good luck in selecting my advisors. I think the idea of department ambassadors sounds pretty good, because I think the majors themselves might weirdly be more informed than professors in the department. I had an advisor once who was in the theater studies department, but couldn't give me advise about theater classes because they didn't really know what was being offered.”
- “Some underclassmen find themselves approaching upperclassmen with their questions, as older students can offer practical advice that professors might not have the knowledge or time to provide.”
- “I felt plenty advised but that's because I basically already used an unofficial version of the department ambassadors. I HIGHLY RECOMMEND implementing this program. Talking with upperclassmen has always helped me, and I always try to help the underclassmen below me with their courses and their majors.”

Peer Institution Policies

Princeton has an informal student ambassador program called “peer advisers,” in which departments identify student contacts, whose names appear on each departmental page. At Duke,

there are “Majors Unions,” student-run councils that serve as liaisons between undergraduates and the departments. They organize events, resume workshops, invite speakers, and work with the faculty. Only the large majors have respective majors unions, whose members are selected by the DUSs.

Student Opinion

Q: YCC is considering proposing a "department ambassador" program where select juniors and seniors in various academic majors would be made available to answer questions on major requirements, prerequisites, and differences between majors. Would such a program be useful to you or would such a program have been useful to you?

Answer	Response	%
Definitely	622	43%
Probably	574	40%
Probably Not	209	15%
Definitely Not	27	2%
Total	1,432	100%

- A large majority (83%) would probably or definitely have found such a program useful. A small minority (2%) can definitively say such a program would not have been useful to them.

Recommendations

This proposal consists of two parts, with part 2 containing two mutually exclusive sub points.

1. Implement a “Department Ambassador” program, where select juniors and seniors in

various academic majors are made available to answer questions on major requirements, prerequisites, and differences between majors. The department ambassadors will be present at the academic bazaar to assist students, and their contact information (name, residential college, email address) will be posted on their respective departments' websites. The program is not compulsory; departments will opt-in. The Directors of Undergraduate Studies will individually select upperclassmen they deem qualified, based on an application process or another selection method the DUS establishes.

2. The administration should implement one of the following mutually exclusive policy changes, listed below in order of preference:
 - A. Department ambassadors will hold office hours once or twice a week (determined by demand) and will be paid \$12/hr.
 - B. The Department Ambassador program is unpaid and no formal office hours are held. Ambassadors will interact with students via emailing and informal meetings on a voluntary basis.

Contact Information

This project is managed by YCC Representative Michael Leopold (MC '16) and is supervised by YCC Academics Chair David Lawrence (CC '15). They can be contacted at michael.leopold@yale.edu and david.r.lawrence@yale.edu.