

Students, or

Managing the Majors, Minors, and Concentrators

We are here to teach undergraduate liberal arts students. We make one of their requirements for graduation that they complete a major in one of our designated disciplinary or interdisciplinary majors. Departments exist primarily to provide the curricula that form majors. Several interdisciplinary programs also provide majors and most support concentrations. One of the principal tasks of chairs is to manage a department or program's majors, concentrators, and/or minors.

Managing the majors involves a significant amount of advising – assessing whether and how a student can complete the major (or minor, or concentration); suggesting how to proceed through the requirements of the major; helping the student choose an advisor within the department or program; advising about appropriate off-campus studies experiences and approving them; arranging for advice sessions on internships, student research opportunities, graduate schools, and career possibilities; ensuring that a student understands the character of the senior exercise and has made arrangements to complete it in a timely way. It also means working to establish the kind of departmental culture in which students are comfortable (though not necessarily cozy) and feel able to have the intense one-on-one relationships that Kenyon claims it provides to its students. Chairs often organize the social gatherings between students and faculty that provide the sense of camaraderie that students so value and that many faculty members expected when they chose to teach at a liberal arts college like Kenyon. They similarly arrange more academic or intellectual events – panel presentations, study sessions, or lectures, among others – intended especially for the majors/concentrators/minors to give them a sense of an intellectual home.

Chairs can assist the Dean for Academic Advising in a number of ways. Balancing advising loads of departmental faculty is often difficult – some colleagues are naturally good advisors and attractive to students because of the impression they have made in introductory courses. Such colleagues can acquire many more advisees than they can comfortably advise, while other colleagues have relatively low advising loads. Without being heavy handed, chairs might subtly suggest to aspiring majors that they consider advisors other than those who already have well above the average number of advisees.

Another way in which chairs can assist the Dean for Academic Advising is by giving her notice early of students in danger of not completing the requirements to graduate. This situation might arise because the student has not yet successfully completed the senior exercise or due to difficulties passing a required course for the major. An early warning to the Dean for Advising can ensure that appropriate support is mobilized in a timely way.

Many of our better students can benefit from encouragement to apply for post-graduate fellowships and/or competitive internship or trainee programs. Chairs have the information about student success in the major to identify those who should be encouraged to apply for Fulbrights and other post-graduate fellowships. Both urging those strong students to make such applications and informing the Dean for Advising, who oversees post-graduate fellowships, can move them along toward such awards. Chairs similarly have the vantage point to identify students who should be

encouraged to undertake departmental honors. Early identification of such students tends to yield to higher success ratios.

One of the tasks that can consume much time in December and January is advising of majors or potential majors about off-campus study. Chairs are expected to assess whether a student can complete the major given his or her off-campus study plans. This responsibility provides chairs an opportunity to give majors good advice about programs that have proven especially beneficial to other students in the major, about how to use the time abroad to achieve curricular goals, and about how to plan the remainder of the student's semesters at Kenyon to complete the major. Chairs are also expected to approve the individual course plans of students after they have been accepted to off-campus studies programs, including indicating whether a particular course can be used as credit toward the major. Incoming chairs should consult with their predecessors and/or the department as a whole about departmental standards for giving credit toward particular major requirements.