

New Major Peer Advising Program

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In response to the students' growing concerns regarding advising at Columbia, the Columbia College Class of 2007 and the Columbia College Student Council have launched a Peer Advising Pilot Program. Peer advising began as a CCSC initiative after the success of a similar program in the department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. Peer advising is not meant to take the place of major advising. Rather, the program is designed to work in conjunction with pre-existing advising programs within undergraduate departments. Peer advisers assist students by allowing them to obtain advice from a student's perspective that might not otherwise be available. It also allows students to discuss the practical concerns of their major, which can range from course load management and scheduling conflicts to internship and fellowship opportunities within their fields. Departments are benefited by a core group of students that are aware of common student concerns and questions. They also benefit from students that are willing to assist in planning department events for undergraduates. The nature of the Peer Advising Program varies between departments, as does the number of advisers; however, it is our hope that they will all serve the overarching goal of providing an alternate means of advice and guidance for students. Although the first rounds of peer advisers were selected based on application by the department head or professors within the department, to preserve the student-centered nature of this program, all subsequent peer advisers are to be selected, based on applications, by the current peer advisers. We hope that in this way, a firm structure for peer advising can be maintained. The success of these first departments will determine the future of peer advising at Columbia. As of now, the departments of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures, Religion, Computer Science, and Chemistry have already launched the Peer Advising Program. We hope that the anticipated success of this program in these departments will prompt others to follow suit. Currently we are in discussions to expand the program into the Women's and Gender Studies Department as well as Architecture. Given the varying size of departments at Columbia, the program has been tailored to fit both student and departmental needs. Smaller departments do not require the same number of advisers as larger departments. Despite these differences, the goal of providing sound advice from an undergraduate perspective remains the same.

With the March 3rd deadline for Sophomore Major Declaration quickly approaching, we hope that this program will help inform students about their prospective majors. We encourage students within participating departments to seek the counsel of their peer advisers. We also want to urge students who would like to see the Peer Advising Program implemented into their major departments to contact us so we can collaborate in achieving this desire. Several departments have allowed us the freedom to create this program. However, the structure of this program cannot last without student input and support. Should you have any concerns or questions about the Peer Advising Program, please feel free to contact us at ccsc@columbia.edu.

The authors are VP of CC '07, VP for Funding CCSC and Academic Affairs Representative, respectively.