with amendments.) Allford professor of natural religion, moral philosophy, and civil polity Thomas Scanlon voiced a minority concern that the curriculum, by emphasizing the connection between the rest of students’ studies and their lives, was insufficiently scholarly, perhaps even anti-intellectual. Former dean of Harvard College Harry R. Lewis, McKay professor of computer science, lamented that the general-education proposal, whose rationale and substance he applauded, was considered apart from the rest of the curriculum, and thus was “too much of a good thing.” Its eight requirements exceed the seven in the Core, and so have the effect of lessening student choice, countering one of the chief aims of the curricular review as a whole.

Sorting out how, exactly, general education will work—what courses will qualify, how they will relate to other departmental offerings—will be a demanding task. It is entrusted to a new standing committee, chaired by a senior faculty member (as the Core committee is not), but not the FAS dean, and composed of faculty as well as student representatives.

Interim president Derek Bok hailed the faculty’s vote—along with the other measures adopted in recent years—as the culmination of the most comprehensive effort to improve undergraduate education in Harvard’s history. Bok spoke from experience: he has written a book on the subject, and he was president in 1978, when the faculty adopted the Core curriculum by a vote of 182 to 65.

President-elect Drew Gilpin Faust, a United States in the world

• science of the physical universe
• societies of the world
• the United States in the world

Eight Steps to Gen Ed
• aesthetic and interpretive understanding
• culture and belief
• empirical and mathematical reasoning
• ethical reasoning
• science of living systems
• science of the physical universe
• societies of the world
• the United States in the world

Advising Adventures

In the course of overhauling the College curriculum, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) deferred undergraduates’ selection of a concentration—their major field of study—from the end of freshman year until the end of their third semester. The intent was to give students more freedom to explore their interests through freshman seminars and electives. At the same time, FAS members wanted to ensure that students could make more informed choices; they worried particularly about those pursuing science and engineering concentrations, which often require not only a sequence of courses, but also a larger number of courses than are mandated by other fields. The faculty therefore directed that a new academic-consulting mechanism be created at the end of freshman year by the College’s new Advising Programs Office. We asked two first-year students, one relatively confident about his likely concentration and one less sure, to report on the initial “Advising Fortnight,” held from April 9 through April 22.

“You have to do one!” calls Rebekah Lorenz Getman from behind a pile of schedules and “Advising Fortnight” stress balls. The College’s Advising Programs Office has staffed a table on the way out of Annenberg dining hall, where handfuls of freshmen are leaving lunch. Getman, the APO’s program manager for concentration advising, sounds equally enthusiastic each time she explains the mandatory advising conversation to a new group of students.

“We hope it’s more than one” conversation, clarifies Inge-Lise Ameer, assistant dean of advising programs, but she knows that busy freshmen tend to prioritize tomorrow’s midterm over next year’s academic schedule. The APO made the fortnight mandatory so that this year’s freshmen (at least those too conscientious to lie on the on-line reporting tool) would not put off advising meetings until the days before next semester’s deadline for submitting plans of study.

Ameer and Getman have also learned
from past years’ “piecemeal” concentration fairs, in which related departments set up information tables on Annenberg’s rarely visited second floor. Tonight at dinner, no one in Annenberg can miss the horseshoe of tables that cuts down the hall’s hardwood floor and along its far wall. The tables seat 44 concentrations’ worth of professors and undergraduate peer advising fellows (PAFs), forcing freshmen to sit on the floor or drift around the room with picnic-inspired food on plastic plates.

The dinner conversation contains some gripes about the unconventional meal, but we also discuss our concentration choices. Ariel Shaker ’10 makes faces at her perverse friends who actually want to spend the next three years studying science or math—she’s considering both English and the comparative study of religion. Many fortnight events (like “History, Government, Economics, and Social Studies: What’s the Difference?”) target students like her, who are sure of their academic passions but not of their specific disciplines. Michael Brenner, Glover professor of applied math and applied physics, who is applied math’s director of undergraduate studies, demonstrates a similar focus when I ask him for a general pitch. “We don’t have a pitch,” he corrects. Brenner considers it his job to be informative; most freshmen who approach his table bring specific questions. By contrast ChenoWeth Moffatt, the earth and planetary sciences (EPS) academic administrator, describes passing students as looking “uncertain, a bit dazed.” She and her PAFs agree that people don’t really come to college planning to study EPS, so they try to attract freshmen to the concentration, asking about their interests and then trying to find a corresponding aspect of the field. When I say that I prefer studying smaller things than the planet as a whole, Clara Blattler ’08 needs only a moment before she recommends a professor who’s researching climate-affecting microbes.

During the next two weeks, many students (including me) find ourselves too absorbed in work to attend as many events as we would like, but others make time to take advantage of the fortnight’s offerings. On Thursday night, I attend a seminar where six life scientists present summaries of their research. A dozen or so of us stick around for dessert, or to talk to the presenters or advisers. I ask Thomas Torello, the molecular and cellular biology (MCB) concentration adviser, about the differences between MCB and chemical and physical biology, and he explains that the main distinction involves the tools used (molecular biology versus chemistry, physics, etc.). I should read the descriptions of the concentrations in the “Advising Fortnight in the Life Sciences” booklet, and highlight key words. He recommends that I talk to lots of people, as well, because distinguishing between the concentrations depends largely on feeling—that ineffable quality that these kinds of events are designed to convey.

My friend Mike Murray’s turning point comes on Monday night at the Life Sciences Advising Open House. One of his prospective concentrations, biological anthropology, is at the same table as the unfamiliar human and evolutionary biology, so he ends up talking to people in both fields. He likes the advisers’ enthusiasm, and now he’s deciding between the two concentrations. Other students mention the value of meeting upperclassmen from different fields, or learning which concentrations allow them to take the classes they want. And some of the events are enjoyable in themselves. “This food makes me want to do statistics,” comments one girl at that department’s Asian-flavored luncheon.

On April 22, I feel no surer about a concentration than I did two weeks earlier, but the events have motivated me to make a post-fortnight appointment with a life sciences adviser. Of course no one intended the fortnight to be self-contained; even the APO’s final “Thank You Celebration” doesn’t feel like an end. My classmates and I, throwing darts and drinking root beer in the shiny new Cambridge Queen’s Head pub where we’ll socialize together in the next three years, are moving forward.

The Advising Fortnight redefined some freshmen’s academic plans; for others it was a peripheral happening that, if nothing else, got them thinking about the next three years. No one seemed to object to learning more about his or her favorite subject, although some students thought the lunchtime giveaways (pens, pads, Frisbees, water bottles, T-shirts) a bit extravagant. But sophomore Katie Beck, an APO staffer who worked throughout the fortnight, thinks the tangible propaganda was important: “It’s about a cultural change.” The more familiar students grow with that antiquated term and the more they talk about academic planning, the more successful next year’s events will be. Perhaps in a decade the Advising Fortnight—like reading period, or the “shopping week” before students officially choose classes—will truly embed itself in the culture, and become one of those traditions that define the Harvard experience.

Joseph Patton Shivers ’10 of Salem, Ohio, will join Adams House in the fall and is inclining toward a concentration in molecular and cellular biology.

I was absent for most of Harvard College’s inaugural “Advising Fortnight.”

In my defense, the whole affair was about as awkward as a middle-school dance—the sort of event that I credit with making me believe that on some occasions, in light of the potential for sweaty palms and forced conversation, absence isn’t only desirable, it’s situationally mandated.

And it’s not that I ever had any explicit intention of letting the fortnight pass me by; there was the day in early April, for instance, when I walked into the freshman dining hall and found it turned into a display arena for the College’s various concentrations. Mildly concerned that there was no place to sit and eat (all the tables were filled with departmental literature and concentration advisers), I nevertheless grabbed a few chicken fingers and some fruit on a toothpick, and—eating while I walked—resolved to give the whole thing a chance.

It was a learning experience, to be sure. Novice
Practically Perfect in Every Way

by CASEY N. CEP ’07

I

n small white rooms lit by fluorescent lamps and littered with empty soda bottles or coffee cups, undergraduates often find themselves heading off to bed—or staying awake through the night—without finishing their reading for section or completing their papers for seminar. What to do, they wonder, as they sit restlessly at their desks, or settle in between their sheets—what to do when, in a few hours, they enter slightly larger classrooms, much larger lecture halls, or smaller seminar rooms? Unprepared and uneasy, some stay home, others go but resolve to be silent, while still others shed their uneasiness on the walk to class and—with regret—fake, pretend, and act their way through the day.

Whatever the reason—the distractions of social life or the commitment of extracurriculars, the joy of performing or the stress of having to be perfectly prepared—students at the College very often find themselves without enough time for the business of college. The pressures to do it all and to do well continue to rise, while students find themselves less and less prepared to find ways of surviving them.

“I don’t think students are making choices. Instead, they are choosing to try and do everything,” says Timothy McCarthy ’93, senior resident tutor in Quincy House and adjunct professor at the Kennedy School of Government. “There’s an increasing amount of pressure on un-

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