

Talking Points for Sophomores and Their Advisors

Questions to Consider in the Third Semester

Who were the faculty members, graduate students, deans, or other teachers with whom you made a real connection last year?

This is the first question you ought to discuss with your advisor. Beginning your discussion this way can do two things: it will help you figure out what areas of the curriculum you might be drawn to; and, more importantly, it will make you recognize your obligation to reach out to your favorite teachers in order to stay connected. Don't be shy. Your former teachers will be delighted to see you again and hear what you have done over the summer, and what you plan to do in the coming year. Make a promise that you will visit office hours of at least one of these people before the end of September.

What are you thinking of as possible areas of concentration?

The biggest question of your sophomore year is, of course, the declaration of your concentration. If you already know which courses you plan to take, your conversation can easily move to next steps for researching concentration tracks and requirements, and meeting with possible concentration advisors. Many sophomores remain undecided about their concentration at this point. If you are in this situation, you can then discuss the following question:

What are five or six areas that have captured your interest, either through courses, co-curricular activities, or in other ways, since you arrived here last fall?

Discussing this will give your advisor an overall picture of things, and help frame and direct your conversation. Your advisor can help you think about how to combine certain areas that are complementary, how to test out interest in a specific area, or simply how to begin the process of research-and-elimination. Once you have narrowed down your choices, you can then research concentration tracks and requirements and talk with selected concentration advisors.

If you haven't identified 5 or 6 areas already, here are some questions to ask yourself:

- What did you come to Brown thinking you wanted to study, and how has that changed or grown as a result of your first year?
- More specifically, what worked for you and what didn't last year? Which courses were the most successful/exciting/fertile, and which ones really missed the mark?
- What kind of approaches to knowledge do you find yourself drawn to? Are you fascinated by hands-on lab work, and the kinds of questions about the natural world such investigation raises or helps to answer? Do you find yourself interested in courses that ask for a high level of abstract analysis? Are you attracted to courses where you study and interpret written texts, codes, or other

symbolic systems? Do you return repeatedly to courses that ask you to consider the relationship of individuals to society, or to compare different cultures or social institutions?

- Take a step back from courses, approaches, and the framework of concentrations and careers, and just think about what **interests** you in the world. What kinds of things draw your attention in the newspaper, online, in books, movies, and in conversations? What are the kinds of questions you like to think about?

These questions should lead you into a substantive and revealing conversation about your general interests and possible areas of study. Based on this discussion, your advisor should be able to refer you to other faculty in specific concentrations. Feel free to talk to several faculty members in the departments or programs in which you are considering concentrating, since different professors may have different approaches to their field based on their specialty. Ask them what brought them to their area of study. Eventually, you will want to speak directly to the departmental concentration advisor, since he or she will be able to give you concrete guidance about how to construct a coherent program of study that both satisfies the concentration's requirements and forms part of your own liberal education at Brown.