A Short Handbook for

Concentration Advisors

Office of the Dean of the College
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island
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The Concentration Advisor’s Role

As a concentration advisor, you are the faculty member responsible for delivering information about your academic programs to current and prospective undergraduates. It is an important job, and doing it well can play a significant role in shaping how students view their Brown academic experience. We have prepared this handbook to make the job a little easier for you. In it you will find an overview of the issues that you will typically face during the year, along with some “best practices” we have encountered in working with advisors across the University.

Brown's open curriculum is one of our great assets, embodying a philosophy of education that places intellectual and moral weight on a student's right to choose. For this reason, the choice of a concentration represents a major event of undergraduate academic life, and the process of “declaring” (as we call it) is something both students and advisors need to take seriously. Students are asked to account for courses they will take and also – more crucially – to write an essay defending their concentration choice. As a concentration advisor, you can make this process more meaningful for students by taking the time to meet with them and to talk about their essays. These initial encounters will set the tone for the rest of your advising relationship.

You can also make a student’s choice more meaningful by clarifying the dimensions of your discipline. What are its basic aims, or modes of inquiry? How do the requirements of your concentration reflect these aims? The answers may seem obvious to you, but for many undergraduates your field is uncharted territory. Our hope is that Brown students will expand their intellectual horizons while deepening their analytic capacities through the work they do in a discipline. You can play an important role by explaining disciplinary distinctions to students. We also suggest that you encourage your concentrators to pursue independent research, to write an advanced paper, to complete a creative project, or to draw together some aspect of your field’s intellectual traditions through an integrated series of courses. Your encouragement will go a long way toward challenging students to get the most out of their educations.

Closely monitoring your students can serve as another form of encouragement. You will certainly want to maintain a record of their progress through required courses and to document any changes that you approve along the way. We hope electronic tools such as Advising Sidekick, or ASK, (http://ask.brown.edu) will aid you in this work. Some students may ask you to evaluate courses they have taken at other universities in order to receive transfer credit from Brown. Sophomores or juniors may want you to help them strategize for a semester or summer abroad. Seniors may need information about your honors program or help in developing a capstone project. They will also need you to clear them for graduation, both in the fall semester (for midyear completers) and in the spring (for May graduates). Please also consider pointing all of your concentrators toward research and fellowship opportunities, internships, and other experiences. This booklet contains suggestions for managing all of these tasks.

The most important thing you can do as an advisor, though, is to get to know your concentrators. Because so many Brown undergraduates are self-motivated, we may think that they neither need nor want our advice, but this view is mistaken. In fact, students regularly report that thoughtful mentoring from concentration advisors has been essential in helping them choose courses, find fellowship and research opportunities, and even select career paths. In other words, your efforts to reach out to concentrators both socially and academically – and to connect them with other students and faculty in your department – will make a difference.

The next section of this booklet offers a few thoughts about how to foster a sense of community in your program. You will likely have other ideas, but in whatever you attempt, remember that the staff in the Office of the Dean of the College is pleased to help, so feel free to call us with your questions and concerns. A list of useful contacts accompanies this booklet; we look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, we want to thank you for serving as an advisor, and we wish you and your students great success in the coming year.

Maud S. Mandel
Dean of the College
Advising Fundamentals

Advisor Orientation

We offer an orientation to support your work as concentration advisors; those of you who serve as Directors of Undergraduate Studies for your department will also be invited to a series of lunches throughout the academic year. The Associate Dean for the Curriculum leads these sessions, along with selected faculty and staff. You will be able to ask questions, share advising tips with other faculty, and review ASK, the electronic advising tool. If you cannot attend an Advisor Orientation Session, you may download key materials by logging onto ASK and clicking "Materials" from the left toolbar.

ASK: Brown’s Electronic Advising Tool

ASK (for “Advising Sidekick” at https://ask.brown.edu) is an electronic advising tool that allows you to access student information. Sophomores must use ASK to declare their concentration. Concentration advisors can view their concentrator’s declarations, internal academic records, course enrollment, and a portfolio of past work. The advantage for you and for our students is not only greater convenience but also greater continuity of information. Advisors are able to view students’ work all the way back to the summer prior to matriculation, and thus have concrete evidence of students’ growth over time. A set of user guides with screen shots and instructions is available at http://www.brown.edu/go/askhelp.

Focal Point: Brown’s Concentration Search Tool

Most students will begin their research on Brown’s various concentrations by visiting Focal Point (http://brown.edu/academics/college/concentrations). Focal Point is an interactive web tool that allows students to explore the many intellectual paths they can take a Brown. The site provides summaries of concentration offerings, enrollment statistics, tracks, opportunities for capstones and honors, names of DUG leaders, and the career paths taken by recent alumni, linking to data gathered by CareerLab. Focal Point also outlines the skills and capacities a student will develop through coursework and other projects in each concentration.

Please be sure to email Focal_Point@brown.edu if there are changes to your concentration that should be reflected on the site.

Special Cohorts of Advisors

Deans of the College and Student Life

Academic deans are available for drop-in consultations with students and advisors every weekday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Dean of the College office on the second and third floors of University Hall. Students may also make appointments with individual deans according to their academic interests. If you have a question about upper-class advising, feel free to contact the Associate Dean for the Curriculum.

If you have concerns about a student’s health or well-being, or if you know one of your advisees is having an issue with a roommate, or with housing in general, you should contact the Office of Student Life (x3-3800), located at 42 Charlesfield Street, or Counseling and Psychological Services (x3-3476), located on the 5th floor of J. Walter Wilson.

Academic Support, International Student and Visitor Support, and Pre-Professional Advising

The third floor of J. Walter Wilson has become a hub of both general academic support and specialized academic advising and resources. The Academic Support office provides support for time management, exam preparation, study skills and much more. Transfer students and all students with questions about transferring credits to Brown, either before or after matriculation, can get information and support in the Transfer Advising Center. International students and visitors can seek support and guidance from the International and Visitors office. Students and alumni interested in exploring study and practice in the health professions, including pre-medical advising, law and business now also have a hub for specialized advising and support.

Faculty Advising Fellows

Faculty Advising Fellows are experienced academic advisors who host regular lunches and dinners with students at different venues on campus. This might be a way for you to sponsor a gathering with your own concentrators. The Faculty Fellows program would also be happy to help you host an outside speaker, if your speaker is willing to meet after hours—and outside your department—with other students on campus.
Students at Brown value community. You can enrich your students’ experience of the concentration by helping them make connections not only to your discipline but also to you, to other students, and to faculty in your department. Such connections begin in individual meetings and continue through a whole range of group activities, as described below.

Outreach to First-Years and Sophomores
Your first point of contact with future concentrators may take place even before classes have started. Each year, the Office of the Dean of the College (DOC) sponsors an “Academic Expo” on an afternoon during Brown’s new student Orientation, to expose incoming students to the range of courses and concentrations available to them. It is a lively affair, and, as a concentration advisor, you will want to be there. You might also want to bring along a current concentrator to begin building connections among students. A little later in the fall semester, the DOC holds a concentration fair that allows you to meet with prospective concentrators and to answer questions about requirements. The time, date, and location of these events are listed in the calendar accompanying this handbook.

Individual Advising Meetings
Regular office hours are the usual way that advisors meet with current and future concentrators. Plan to set aside about two hours per week for this purpose, and post the times on your department’s website. The heaviest traffic you’ll encounter will be at the beginning of the semester, and during the so-called “advising period” during fall and spring pre-registration (late October and early April each year). The “advising period” is a time when prospective concentrators will want to discuss the possibility of declaring, and other students may come with different concerns. The issues will vary by semester level. New concentrators might be interested in research or capstone opportunities. Those who are planning to study abroad may need to figure out how to fulfill concentration requirements at a university outside the U.S. You can ensure a stronger relationship by requiring your concentrators to “check in” with you each semester. At the very least, you should require all students in their seventh and eighth semesters to meet with you at least once each term so that you can approve their plans, and so that they can be cleared for graduation.

Departmental Undergraduate Groups (DUGs)
A DUG is a group of students that meets regularly to help other concentrators in the department connect with one another, with faculty, and with alumni. DUGs enhance the sense of community in a concentration in a variety of ways: by hosting events with concentrators, prospective concentrators, and graduate students; organizing guest lectures; participating in concentration fairs; and contributing to departmental newsletters, websites, and undergraduate academic journals. Some of the most successful projects, including disciplinary conferences and Brown Degree Days events, have been organized collaboratively by departments and their DUGs. Anything that brings your concentrators in contact with one another and with your faculty will help cultivate an intellectual community and make your department a welcome home for undergraduates.

A recent review of DUGs has revealed some best practices that have been particularly effective. Many DUGs highlight and encourage students to pursue undergraduate research, helping to facilitate relationships with faculty outside the classroom and showcasing student work. The Middle East Studies DUG, for example, hosts an undergraduate paper series that provides a forum for students to share their independent research on the region across disciplines. In previous years, the Math, Urban Studies, and Modern Culture and Media DUGs have organized or helped departments organize conferences bringing together undergraduates, faculty, alumni, and other scholars and practitioners. Other groups have worked to strengthen ties between the department and the local community, including the Sociology DUG, which recently created a committee on community engagement. DUGs can also serve as a useful resource for chairs and concentration advisors by serving as a vehicle for collecting feedback about the student experience or communicating important information between upperclass students and prospective concentrators.

With nearly sixty active DUGs, we have almost reached the Taskforce on Undergraduate Education’s 2008 goal of having a DUG in every concentration. If your department does not have an active DUG, you might try working with your students—ideally juniors—to create one. If you have eager students in mind, you might direct them to the DUG Coordinators, student staffers at the Curricular
Resource Center who advise their peers about the range of resources available at Brown. They can learn about DUG best practices and connect with DUG leaders in related fields.

Each DUG is eligible for up to $1000 in annual funds: $500 from your department will be matched by up to $500 from the Dean of the College office. To apply, your DUG must have one or more student leaders, a faculty sponsor (which may be you), and a list of activities with an associated budget. Every DUG is expected to hold at least two events each semester and no fewer than four per year. One of these should be a social event welcoming new concentrators. Funding requests are submitted online via UFUNDS (https://apps.college.brown.edu/ufunds), and you or the faculty sponsor must endorse the request. We recommend that you work closely with your DUG to ensure continuity from year to year, and to learn from your students about how they can help create a stronger community in your department. For more information about DUG events and funding, visit http://brown.edu/go/dug or contact the Director of the Curricular Resource Center, whose contact information is listed in the resource addendum that accompanies this booklet.

Other Departmental Gatherings

The beginning and the end of the year are often good times to bring concentrators together with members of your department. Many departments hold welcome-back parties in the fall; some host holiday gatherings after classes have ended in December. While these events are not necessarily your responsibility to organize, you can make a difference by sending an email to concentrators reminding them of the date and time, and inviting them to be present.

A number of departments across campus also host events for students who have achieved honors in the concentration. In such events, honors students are sometimes asked to present a brief account of their work for the benefit of those gathered. You can increase the value—and fun—of these events by inviting recently declared sophomores and juniors to attend. The graduating seniors can explain the timeline of their honors work and offer helpful tips on such things as finding primary and secondary readers and reserving a carrel in the Rock for thesis work. Some departments publish a list of seniors who are graduating with honors along with their thesis titles and summaries. Such initiatives help spread the word about your honors program and plant seeds for future student projects.

Brown Degree Days

You can advertise the value of your concentration to students by bringing successful alums back to campus. “Brown Degree Days” was initially conceived to help sophomores witness the range of possible life paths emerging from a concentration. We learned, though, that first-years, juniors, and seniors also benefited from these events. Departments host events in the weeks leading up to the concentration declaration in March and April, or during other key periods such as Family Weekend in October. Modest funding is available from CareerLAB and Alumni Relations can help you locate alumni. A few years ago the History Department made a wonderful video with current students and alumni who participated in their Brown Degree Days event (http://www.brown.edu/Departments/History). Such events foster community among current concentrators. At the same time, they build stronger networks between students and alumni—networks that can, of course, enhance career opportunities for your students. For more information visit the CareerLAB website: http://brown.edu/careerlab/bdd.
Sophomore Year: The Concentration Declaration

All students are required to declare their concentrations by their fifth semester. This culminating event of the sophomore year—the official beginning of your advising relationship with concentrators—is also your first major responsibility as an advisor, and it can consume a fair amount of time during the spring semester. This section discusses the process in more detail, and offers suggestions for how to manage it.

Because we want students to be deliberative and informed when they choose their concentration, we expect them to have met with you before completing a declaration. This can mean a lot of meetings for you, especially if your concentration is large. Needless to say, it is important to start early so that students have ample time to meet with you while pondering their options. You can encourage prospective concentrators to begin sooner rather than later in a number of ways.

- Schedule and publicize special “declaration days” office hours early in the spring semester.
- Ask faculty in your department to announce your office hours in their classes, and encourage prospective concentrators to make appointments early. Post the same message online.
- Require concentrators to submit an early draft of their declaration. The deadline will motivate them to begin the declaration process sooner than they might have otherwise; it also promotes a more thoughtful approach to the entire process.
- Ask your DUG to hold a concentration declaration workshop for prospective concentrators, and have students sign up for office hours at the workshop.

These events prompt students to think about the relationship of their aims and aptitudes to your concentration, and help draw them to you well before the declaration deadline.

Pre-Declaration Meetings

Your initial meeting with a prospective concentrator should focus on the student’s intellectual interests and the concentration’s requirements. You might ask, for example: What do you find compelling about this concentration? Do you consider it a bridge to something you will do after college? Will it be necessary or desirable to take one or more courses during summer session? Does it make sense to study abroad given your interest in this field? Finally and most basically: Will you be able to complete the concentration in the time you have remaining at Brown? Many students face the task of choosing a concentration with some trepidation, feeling that they are making an irreversible life decision. As a concentration advisor, you can remind your students that their concentration choice does not determine the rest of their life. For instance, majoring in biology now does not eliminate the option of law school or social work at some point in the future.

If after this first meeting the student decides to declare, you should ask for a draft of the essay that will become a part of the concentration declaration form. This is described in more detail below. By asking for a draft, you’ll be able to gauge the depth of the student’s seriousness and require revisions to the essays and course list, if necessary.

Before meeting a second time with an intended concentrator, ask the student to bring a copy of his or her internal academic record at Brown and, if relevant, a copy of transcripts from previous schools or study away/study abroad institutions. You will need this information in order to finalize the list of concentration courses they have already completed as well as the courses they intend to take. Review this course list along with the final version of the declaration essay.

The Concentration Declaration Process

Students are required to complete the concentration declaration process electronically in ASK: https://ask.brown.edu. The declaration consists of three parts. The first is an essay representing the intellectual rationale for the concentration. It should articulate the student’s goals in the concentration in relation to the broader learning objectives of a Brown education—including the goal of improved writing skills (a complete list of Brown’s Liberal Learning goals is available online at http://brown.edu/academics/college/degree/curriculum). The second part is a list of courses already taken, and those that will be taken in the future, to realize these learning goals. The list should be realistic: Although students are not obliged to take every course on the list, they do need to have a reasonable plan for completing all required courses by the end of the eighth semester. The final section allows students to discuss additional academic goals outside the concentration and projects or research they hope to accomplish.
In ASK, concentration advisors and department managers may customize what their prospective concentrators see upon starting a declaration in your field. For instance, you may add unique messages, concentration-specific questions, and “Course Attributes” that require students to specify which requirement a particular course will satisfy. Some departments have their own worksheets for this purpose but please keep in mind that such forms do not substitute for the official declaration in "ASK.”

The concentration declaration functions as a contract between you and the student, and by authorizing it, you become the student’s official advisor for the remainder of his or her time at Brown. Once this occurs, the student may pre-register for the next semester. Although students are the ones responsible for filing on time, you might want to remind them of the deadlines.

For most students, the deadline for declaring a concentration is April 1 of the fourth semester, just before the fall pre-registration period. Advisors have a two-week period during which to review declarations; concentrations must be approved by April 14. For students who have taken time off or who came in as transfer students, however, the fourth semester may occur during the fall term, and thus the deadline will come just before spring pre-registration, on October 11; advisors must approve these declarations by October 27. These deadlines are published on the Registrar’s website (http://brown.edu/registrar/calendar); students are notified each semester by email as the deadline approaches. Dates are also listed in the calendar accompanying this booklet.

Students may change their concentration at any time, under the condition that they can complete all new concentration requirements by the end of eight semesters. If the new concentration cannot be completed within eight semesters of enrollment, it will not be approved.

Declaring a Second Concentration
Students at Brown are allowed to “double concentrate” if they can complete requirements for two concentrations in the standard eight-semester sequence of study. A maximum of two courses may be applied to fulfill requirements for both concentrations. (Note: The maximum number of concentrations a student may declare is three.) Who should do this? Those who have intellectual passions spanning two distinct areas are good candidates, but even they should leave room for other kinds of study. Too often, students double concentrate for the wrong reasons (e.g., because they think it will improve their chances of getting into graduate school). You might therefore discuss with them the costs and benefits of declaring a second concentration. For many, the cost of limiting course selection will outweigh the perceived benefit of listing two concentrations on one transcript. Students who get the most out of their Brown degree often study just one discipline in depth and many others along the way, drawing out the connections among subjects. Those destined for graduate school can easily highlight such intellectual connections in their applications, even without a second concentration.

If a student is determined to add yours as a second concentration, he or she must declare the concentration in ASK and you must approve this declaration by the final day of classes in the student’s seventh semester of enrollment. This deadline is published on the DOC and Registrar websites. The process for declaring a second concentration is otherwise exactly the same as the process for declaring the first concentration. Note: A student may not declare a second concentration in ASK while the first declaration is pending. The student must have the first declaration approved by the concentration advisor prior to beginning a second declaration.

A student who chooses to double concentrate will earn one baccalaureate degree with two concentrations. This student’s transcript might list “Bachelor of Science: ScB-Geology-Biology and AB: Math” or “Bachelor of Arts: AB-Africana Studies and AB: English” (If one or both of the concentrations is a Bachelor of Science program, the degree earned will be a Bachelor of Science).

Combined Degree Options

Combined Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science Degrees
While approximately twenty percent of students choose to complete a single baccalaureate degree with more than one concentration (as above), an even smaller percentage choose to graduate with two different baccalaureate degrees: the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science. Students who follow this path organize a five-year program of study that must include one concentration in the life sciences, physical science, or mathematics and one concentration in the humanities or social sciences. The combined degree option allows students to complete
both courses of study while taking advantage of the open curriculum and exploring a greater range of courses outside these two disciplines. This student’s transcript would list, for example, “Bachelor of Arts & Bachelor of Science: SCB—Computational Biology, AB—Archeology & Ancient World.” Students interested in pursuing this five-year option must declare their intentions by the end of their fifth semester. Interested students should contact the Dean for Science Center Outreach, whose contact information is listed in the resource addendum that accompanies this booklet.

Concurrent Baccalaureate and Master’s Degree
This program allows exceptionally capable students to combine their last year or two of undergraduate study with graduate study, resulting in the simultaneous completion of both a baccalaureate degree and a master’s degree. Eligible students will have achieved a record of academic excellence that demonstrates depth as well as breadth. Entrance requirements into this program are numerous and quite specific. Interested students are advised to acquaint themselves with program guidelines early in their college career and contact the Deputy Dean of the College for more information.

5th Year Master’s Programs
Brown’s 5th-year Master’s Program allows undergraduates to pursue a master’s degree in select departments in the year immediately following completion of the undergraduate degree. Eligible students must apply for admission to this program before they complete the baccalaureate degree. A list of participating academic departments and other information is available on the Dean of the College website (http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/combined-degrees).
Concentration Requirements

One of your main responsibilities as an advisor is to oversee concentration requirements. This means you will need to know the requirements yourself, so that you can properly convey them to students. They should be able to understand not simply what they have to take but why, and thereby understand their responsibility to the methods, content, and questions of your field and its intellectual traditions.

The online Course Bulletin (http://bulletin.brown.edu) is the official record of your concentration’s requirements as approved by the College Curriculum Council (CCC). Focal Point’s (http://brown.edu/academics/college/concentrations) list of requirements will redirect users to the Bulletin and for consistency, we recommend that your department’s website do the same. To make any changes to the Bulletin, contact the Registrar’s office; they will also confirm that the requirements conform to the CCC's records.

Prerequisites and Advanced Placement

Many concentrations offer one or more gateway courses that every student must pass before taking higher-level courses. Some concentrations offer placement exams or accept Advanced Placement test scores as substitutes for pre-requisites. In all cases where AP credits are accepted, the student must earn a 4 or 5 on the AP to make the substitution. Some AP scores are automatically transcripted when students matriculate at Brown; others are added only upon students’ request, after they have completed a required course in the appropriate department. AP scores noted on the academic record are recognized by Banner if they fulfill a pre-requisite, and students may register for a higher-level course accordingly. As a concentration advisor, it will probably fall to you to vet students’ requests for AP score substitutions, so it is important for you to be familiar with the rules of your department.

Transfer Credits

Students may ask to transfer credits earned at another institution to count them toward their concentration. These requests happen most frequently at the beginning of the semester—when transfer students first matriculate at Brown, or after students return from studying abroad or from studying away in the U.S. Most concentrations allow a maximum of two (2) transfer credits toward requirements. For study abroad, the rule of thumb is that two credits may count toward the concentration for one semester; another credit is sometimes allowed when a student stays for two. Once again, you should be familiar with the rules for your own concentration before approving any such requests.

Essentially, there are two sets of criteria governing the transferability of credit—those for your concentration and those for the College. Therefore, we recommend that you tell students who are planning to study away to get approval in advance from your department as well as from the College. While retroactive approval has the advantage of providing you with full information about the course and the student’s performance, it poses the disadvantage (to the student) of undertaking coursework that your department may not accept for concentration credit or that the College will not transcript. The Assistant Dean for Academic Support manages the approval process for the College. More information is available at https://www.brown.edu/academics/college/degree/course-options/study-away-usa.

It is important to note that not all concentration requirements must be transcripted. Occasionally, a department will approve a course for concentration credit that cannot be transcripted—usually because it carries only three semester credit hours rather than the required four. In such cases, students can still graduate if they have met Brown’s degree requirements (thirty courses on the Brown transcript, eight semesters of enrollment credit, writing proficiency, and completion of a concentration).
Studying Abroad

International education is vitally important for students in the 21st century. As a concentration advisor, you should encourage your students to think seriously about studying abroad for a summer or a semester and to consider studying a language, even if such study does not seem directly pertinent. It is surprising what kinds of doors can open for those who have developed this kind of cultural fluency. An overview of study abroad programming possibilities can be found at http://brown.edu/oip.

The Office of International Programs offers several opportunities for student engagement abroad. Brown's Global Independent Study Project (GLISP) allows students studying abroad to pursue a directed research project under the guidance of a Brown faculty member. Because such projects are tied to students’ academic interests, they can help a semester abroad become a more integral part of the concentration. The hope is that projects begun during a semester away might even become the basis for a senior thesis once the student returns to campus. An overview of the GLISP program, its pedagogy, and a list of recent GLISP can be found at http://brown.edu/oip/programs/global-independent-study-glisp.

Brown + 1 offers select Brown undergraduates the opportunity to complement a Brown course of study with a master's degree from Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Edinburgh, or Chinese University of Hong Kong. Accepted students spend at least one semester of their junior year in Spain, Ireland, Scotland, or Hong Kong, making progress toward a one-year master’s degree in any of a number of disciplines of study. Upon returning to Brown, students complete the remaining requirements for their undergraduate degrees. After graduating from Brown, students may return to the University to complete the remaining requirements for the master’s degree. An overview of the Brown + 1 program can be found at http://brown.edu/oip/programs/brown-1.

Tracking Student Progress

As mentioned above, the concentration declaration functions as a kind of contract with a student. Any changes to a student’s plan must be entered there, so that all advisors can track a student’s progress toward graduation. Your department may regularly allow certain substitutions for required courses, or, alternatively, you may require concentrators to petition for such substitutions. Whatever your method, it's critical to document any authorized substitutions to preclude future misunderstandings, and to have a record for a later advisor in the event that you step down. This will be especially important as a student enters the final two semesters of coursework. ASK allows you to share information about concentrators with other advisors and to keep all of it in one place and from year to year.
Junior Year: Delving Deeper

As concentrators enter their fifth semester, your role as an advisor will no longer be narrowly focused on the choice of concentration and whether or not a student can complete it. Meeting with your juniors, you will probably want to know more about their goals and aspirations. Some questions you may want to ask are listed below:

- Are there fellowship or internship experiences that they should consider, and that can amplify coursework in the concentration?
- Have they thought about pursuing a senior project? Do they know where to find more information about these opportunities?
- How are they planning to work on their writing abilities in their final two years?
- Are they considering post-baccalaureate study?
- Do they want to take time off before pursuing graduate work?
- How many faculty in the department know them well enough to write a letter of recommendation?

Students report that the most meaningful advising encounters have emerged through conversations like these—when discussions of a concentration program expand to include broader questions. As you begin to work with your juniors, we encourage you to take your conversations to this next level.

Fellowships, Internships, and Research Experiences

Juniors should be encouraged to pursue opportunities outside the classroom that enhance their curricular work. Valuable experiences include working in laboratories or doing research for credit or compensation, pursuing internships, and participating in a fellowship program. Students may apply for awards both at Brown and at the national level, working closely with members of your department.

For instance, Brown's Undergraduate Teaching and Research Award (UTRA) offers research stipends for work pursued during the summer or during the academic year. Other notable internal awards are the Social Innovation, Royce, and Royce Sport and Society Fellowships, all managed by the Swearer Center for Public Service. These awards provide funding, mentoring, and a community, allowing students to carry out independent projects of their own design in locations across the United States and around the world. The Watson Institute offers fellowships that support a wide range of international projects, such as the Marla Ruzicka and the Jack Ringer Summer in Southeast Asia Fellowships. Juniors should also be made aware of the Projects for Peace Fellowship as well as the Liman Fellowship for public interest work, and several highly competitive national fellowships, such as the Udall, Goldwater, Beinecke, and Truman fellowships. The Dean of the College office's annual Fellowships, Internships, and Research Experiences Fair is listed on the Advising Calendar that accompanies this Handbook.

For a complete list of Brown-supported awards and advisors who specialize in Fellowships, Internships and Research Experiences at Brown and beyond, consult our website: http://brown.edu/college/fellowships.

The BrownConnect initiative links students to the Brown community for career success. At http://brownconnect.brown.edu, students can search for internships, research opportunities, funding and alumni connections. Throughout the year, staff from the Center for Careers and Life After Brown (CareerLAB) hosts workshops and alumni panels about professional opportunities that can help students build the skills they need to find, apply for and excel at their internships. Your students might also be interested in learning about LINK awards, which provide funding for unpaid or low-paying internships.

More information about BrownConnect programs and internships can be found on CareerLAB's website, http://brown.edu/careerlab. Note that students should begin researching internships as early as October since most application deadlines are in January and February.

Brown's Writing Requirement

A final opportunity to emphasize with your juniors is the chance to improve their writing. Strong writing skills allow students to excel in all kinds of academic work; they lead to significant cognitive gains in the concentration; and they are among the abilities most sought-after by future employers. There is every reason to urge your students to take the time in college to work on these skills; they may never have another opportunity like it.

Indeed, at Brown, this opportunity is an obligation. Even though our curriculum, by tradition, leaves open
the question of “general education” requirements, the University has nonetheless maintained a requirement for the baccalaureate degree that all students demonstrate the ability to write well. All students must work on their writing at least twice—once in their first two years of study, and again in their junior or senior year. Students meet the first part of this requirement by completing any English, Comparative Literature, or Literary Arts course, as well as any of the hundreds of courses across the curriculum marked “WRIT,” for “Writing-Designated.” In the final four semesters, students may choose to either take an additional writing course, or to demonstrate work on their writing by another means and to upload that work to ASK.

Because the concentration is the focal point of a student’s academic experience, it makes sense that students should work on their writing in the course of completing their concentration. As an advisor, you will want to steer students toward courses that allow them to develop these abilities; indeed, you should encourage them to learn how to express themselves better in your discipline. If you would like more information about Brown’s writing requirement, visit: http://brown.edu/College/curriculum/writing.php or contact the Associate Dean for the Curriculum.

Writing Checks
On occasion you will see that one of your concentrators has received a writing check: a check beside a course in which the instructor has found the student’s writing to be insufficient. Students who receive writing checks are referred to the Director of the Writing Center and Writing Fellows Program, who will assess the student’s writing abilities and help the student develop a plan to fulfill the requirement. This might entail taking an English course, enrolling in a course with a writing fellow attached to it, or working with a writing associate at Brown’s Writing Center. If you have concerns about any of your student’s written communication skills, please do not hesitate to contact the Director of the Writing Center.

Life after Brown
Many of your juniors will be preoccupied with the question of what they will do after college. Don’t be surprised, then, if students come to you with questions about their future. You may feel that your life experience does not equip you to help them. Yet you might be just the person to prompt self-reflection by asking your students some “big questions.” Once they have begun to articulate their short- and long-term goals and have given some thought to the values, skills and interests they have cultivated inside and beyond the classroom, they will be better prepared to act on your referrals with a greater sense of confidence and purpose. You can then direct your students to the advisors in the Office of Careers and Life After Brown (CareerLAB). Or you can work with members of your DUG and CareerLAB staff to fashion an event that will help your concentrators as a whole. To arrange a consultation with CareerLAB call x3-3326.

CareerLAB hosts a number of event throughout the year, including “Brown Degree Days” that allow students to learn from and network with alumni who have pursued diverse career paths. You might also direct your students to use LinkedIn or BRUnet, the online alumni network (http://alumni.brown.edu), to reach out to Brown alumni who have concentrated in your area.

As the question of learning outcomes dominates national debates on higher education, and as jobs become scarcer, many people—including some of your concentrators, perhaps—are beginning to wonder about the effects of the college experience: What’s it all about? You have a unique opportunity to address that question as your students approach the final year of the concentration.
This last portion of this handbook contains practical information about the senior year, as well as ideas about how you can encourage seniors to make the most of their Brown experience.

Ideally, students’ last year at Brown will provide a meaningful culmination of their educational experience. To that end, the 2008 report of Brown’s Task Force on Undergraduate Education recommended that all concentration programs define learning outcomes for their concentrators, provide students with opportunities for “capstone experiences,” and develop systematic plans for assessing their students’ success in achieving departmental learning outcomes (http://brown.edu/College/tue).

As a concentration advisor, it is not exclusively your job to see that all this work gets done. Nonetheless, you can make progress in your department by steering your seniors toward their own positive learning outcomes, through some kind of senior-year project.

**Senior-Year Projects**

If your concentration already requires a senior project, then it is your job to make sure students fulfill this expectation. If you don’t require it, you may want to persuade seniors to take on this intellectual challenge voluntarily. Better yet, you could plant the seed with your juniors so they begin planning early. Such a “capstone” experience might take many forms: It could be a focused internship, a teaching apprenticeship, a performance, an exhibition, a large creative work, an advanced seminar paper, a laboratory experiment, a thesis—in short, a substantive contribution to the discipline. Whatever the form, the capstone should lead undergraduates toward the kind of intellectual engagement that faculty experience all the time. For this reason, projects should be supervised by faculty members who monitor students’ progress and give feedback. By completing such a project, seniors will have, in effect, already answered the question, “What’s it all about?” because they will have produced something that reveals the impact of their studies both to themselves and others. This kind of intensive intellectual experience can also lead them toward outcomes they never imagined. Incidentally, the DOC has a modest amount of funding to help support senior projects. Students should consult with the Dean of the College’s website on research opportunities http://brown.edu/academics/college/undergraduate-research.

**Honors in the Concentration**

An honors thesis is one type of capstone project—albeit with a few more strings attached. Your department’s honors program will define the terms on which advanced undergraduates may distinguish themselves through in-depth course work or research in the discipline. Entry into such programs varies by department; check the rules for your own program and make sure that they are clear to you, as well as to your faculty and students. If the rules of your program are unclear, you should take some steps to revise them. The CCC has recently endorsed a set of guidelines for all concentrations, available on the Dean of the College’s honors webpage (http://brown.edu/go/honors). As with all other concentration requirements, honors requirements should be listed on your concentration page in the Course Bulletin.

As an advisor, it is your responsibility to advertise your department’s honors program to juniors, to review their applications (sometimes in conjunction with an honors committee), and to remind faculty members who are supervising honors projects—and students who are doing them—of the relevant deadlines. You can recognize your honors students by arranging appropriate celebratory events at the end of the semester. You might consider doing this with all seniors who have completed capstone projects.

**Latin Honors**

A more conventional sign of honorable achievement in a University education is the classical designation *cum laude*: “with honors.” Less concrete than a written thesis, it is determined not by the concentration but by the College at the very end of a student’s career. Brown grants only one honor at commencement: *magna cum laude*. The determination for *magna* is based on the percentage of “A” grades and marks of “S with distinction” that a student receives in all courses taken at Brown. By Faculty rule, this honor goes to no more than 20% of the graduating class each year. The distinction mark is not released outside the University and is not noted on the internal or official transcripts.
Prizes

Another formal recognition for excellence comes in the form of end-of-year prizes. Some departments have endowed monetary prizes, which they award at commencement to outstanding seniors. Most such prizes are funded by endowments held in the College's budget. You should talk to your department manager about how many prizes your department has, how they are awarded, and in what amounts. The College has limited additional funds to support the awarding of prizes in departments that do not have any endowed prizes. Each spring the Dean of the College office sends an announcement inviting departments to apply for these premiums. For more information, contact Betsy_Valle@Brown.edu.

Clearing Seniors for Graduation

Perhaps the most official role you will play in the life of your students will be to determine whether they have completed the requirements for the concentration. This is one of the necessary steps toward what we call “clearing” seniors for graduation. In October and March every year, you will receive a clearance form for each of your 8th-semester seniors. The packet will include a list of courses in which they are currently enrolled, together with a copy of an internal record for all courses completed. The Registrar asks you to check the records and indicate whether the student has completed or is expected to complete the concentration (including the writing requirement) that semester, and, if not, what requirements remain. This is a very good reason for you to meet with your seniors again—not just to go over their records, but to review their overall Brown experience.

Before you meet, be sure to check any anomalies or substitutions against the student’s official declaration form: Was permission granted to satisfy the requirements by other means? Is there other documentation in the student’s file noting the substitution? If not, the student will not be able to graduate and you will have to inform the Registrar. The Registrar will record the names of students who have not completed the concentration; that office will also notify them. You may want to discuss this situation with the students yourself when you meet with them. It may also be useful to strategize how they can complete the concentration, either at Brown or elsewhere. Keep in mind that all of these students—even if they have requirements pending—can still “walk” in the graduation ceremony, although their names will not appear in the official graduation program. It is quite common for departments to allow students who have not completed degree requirements to participate in their graduation ceremonies.

Aside from this official clearance process, you can view these final meetings as a time for seniors to reflect on their experience at Brown more generally. What was the most useful thing they learned in your concentration? What work are they most proud of? What work was most challenging? Is there anything they would do differently if given a second chance? Asking such questions, even in an informal way, can send a very good message that you are concerned not only about their individual experience but also about the experience of future concentrators. If you were to ask your seniors, moreover, to take a moment to put these thoughts in writing, both you and they might end up with a different picture of the real “outcomes” of your concentration.

Extra Semester Permission

You may refer any student who cannot complete degree requirements within eight semesters of enrollment to the Dean of the College office. The student will still be able to participate in Commencement exercises with their class. They may be able to transfer in remaining requirements from another approved institution with a status known as “enrollment terminated requirements pending.” Different policies govern whether a student may stay at Brown for an additional term depending on whether they must or simply would like to do so. Whether a student needs additional time at Brown or simply chooses an additional semester of enrollment, s/he should discuss the appropriate petition process with the Deputy Dean of the College.

When Necessary to Complete Requirements

Students who have experienced an academic setback (such as having been suspended or having withdrawn during the term, or having earned fewer than three credits in one or more semester) may request ninth semester permission by petitioning the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS). Permission may be granted if the student needs to complete concentration requirements that must be taken at Brown. Students may be eligible for institutional financial aid during this additional term.
Optional 9th Semester

Students may seek an additional semester (either full-time or part-time) to supplement required features of their degree programs, such as: completing an honors thesis course, a second concentration, a study abroad experience for a junior transfer, additional courses not required for the concentration (including courses that satisfy or strengthen pre-health application requirements), etc. Students seeking an optional ninth term would not be eligible for Brown institutional funds, although they may be eligible for other kinds of financial aid.

Commencement Festivities

Your department’s commencement ceremony is the last chance you will have to acknowledge the good work of your students. Students receive their diplomas at the ceremony, in the company of family and friends. You can help make this event more meaningful for everyone who attends—and especially for your students—by taking the time to acknowledge the accomplishments of your graduates, reporting their honors in the department program, narrating one or two of their successes during the formal remarks, and announcing their future plans. Everyone needs to be acknowledged for good work, and a few well-chosen phrases, uttered publicly by a faculty mentor, will be remembered for a very long time. If the Chair of your department presides over these ceremonies, you can help him or her by providing information about concentrators whom you know best. And you should make sure to attend the celebrations yourself. As an advisor, it will mean more to your concentrators than you can imagine if you simply take the time to be present.

Tracking Your Graduates

When a department is asked about the “outcomes” of graduates, it often has trouble coming up with more than anecdotal evidence. Where did your concentrators end up? Knowing the answer to this question can be a great benefit when giving concrete evidence of the success of your program. It is not always possible to keep up with Brown graduates, but making an effort to connect with them before they leave campus can help enormously. Try collecting, for example, their google addresses so a member of your department can drop them a line from time to time. While students might ignore a form letter from the University, they are likely to read an email query from someone in your department, asking them what and how they are doing. You might also have a member of your staff create a simple database, poll colleagues about former students, and update the information. These efforts will pay countless dividends in the future. Indeed, keeping in touch with your alums, and learning about how their lives develop, will give you all the more reason to invite them back for a visit, so they can share their life experience with current students in Careers in the Common Good or Brown Degree Days Events. Departments such as Comparative Literature, English, and Geological Sciences have alumni newsletter, blogs, and forums that are also linked in Focal Point.