

July 2, 2009

Dear Colleagues:

The Division of Physical and Biological Sciences has embarked on a restructuring of undergraduate advising and instructional support services into a central divisional undergraduate affairs unit effective September 1, 2009. The goals of the reorganization are to protect service levels to students as well as the quality of advising and curriculum planning support during a time of fluctuating enrollments and declining funding, including TAS, TA, and staffing funds. This is an opportunity to create a more sustainable advising structure than the current one-advisor/one-department model and take advantage of recent job vacancies to help reduce potential future staff layoffs.

While we have informally considered a centralized advising and student support structure in the past, we are prompted to action now by financial considerations, the number of current departmental job vacancies, and the current soft hiring freeze. The organization being discussed is similar to models at UCSD and other campuses, as well as at UCSC in the School of Engineering and in our own Biological Sciences Undergraduate Program office that supports program planning and advising in both EE Biology and MCD Biology. Located on the third floor of Thimann, the new organization will bring together undergraduate staff advising for the biology majors as well as majors in Chemistry and Biochemistry, Earth and Planetary Sciences, Math, and Physics and include direct advising of students, course articulations, major declarations, requests for course substitution and degree requirement waivers, and processing graduation and honors in the major. This unit will work closely with department chairs, managers, and departmental curriculum committees on affiliated functions such as curriculum planning analysis and reporting, course scheduling, enrollment and course access coordination, disqualification policy administration, student scholarship and awards program coordination, divisional undergraduate events planning, testing accommodations for DRC-eligible students, and maintaining publications and a robust web presence.

On a slightly longer time-scale, I expect further consolidation related to undergraduate functions from our three graduate-only programs. Discussions with those departments will begin later this summer.

Department chairs and department staff have begun working with the dean's office to identify the range of functions the new unit will provide, the challenges from each department's perspective and how best to address those challenges, and how the unit will be staffed. Christina Navarro will manage the new PB Sci Undergraduate Affairs unit, and the unit will report to the dean's office. Currently Christina manages the Biological Sciences Undergraduate Program office.

While this restructuring represents a significant change in departmental administration for a number of our departments, it should improve services to students by providing greater sustainability and coverage during planned and unplanned absences and a single location for all procedural matters related to progress through the majors. The centralized unit will improve communication of advising issues at the campus level by offering a coordinated divisional voice. Faculty will, of course, retain their responsibility for developmental advising in their disciplines, and staff advisors will continue to participate in the department and maintain a connection to departmental curriculum committees, department chairs, and managers.

I appreciate the creative thinking that department chairs and staff are bringing to the planning for this new unit and request your patience and understanding as we move to a new model of undergraduate services to ensure critical support for our students and our departments with reduced resources.

Best,

Steve