EPC surveyed the A&S full-time faculty about pre-major advising. So far, 125 faculty have responded; here is a summary of results. The key points are:

- Advising classes work better than host advising for most faculty (but not all).
- Advising usually doesn’t take up too much of our time.
- There is support available and we can usually get our advising questions answered.

Presumably the respondents are the 125 faculty most interested in telling EPC about advising — either those who are most invested in doing pre-major advising, or those who most want to protest it (one answer to “what resources would be useful?” was “something about why we have to do this at all”). As a result, we cannot assume these results are typical of all A&S faculty; still, there are useful pointers here for further work by EPC and by the proposed new Advising Committee.

Faculty who responded were more or less equally split among humanities, social science, and natural science and mathematics departments, with fewer from arts departments. Just over half were tenured and just over a third were full-time lecturers.

Most respondents have done pre-major advising: 76% have done it in the last 5 years, and another 8% before that. Of those who have not done pre-major advising, the main reasons for not doing it were “no time” and “prefer to spend time advising majors or graduate students”; this is not a surprise. Relatively few said they were discouraged from doing this kind of advising by a dean, chair, or mentor. And most of those who haven’t done pre-major advising said they might consider doing it in the future (about 44% said they would consider it and another 27% said maybe).

Questions about specific advising experiences were only directed to the faculty who have done advising, whether recently or longer ago. A distinct plurality (37%) said the CAP model worked best for them, and about a quarter of respondents said all the advising models seemed equivalent. On the other hand, only about half the respondents who’d done advising answered this question at all.

Most respondents said they spend no more than an hour a week, on average, on pre-major advising; only 23% said it takes several hours a week. And only 2% said the time spent on pre-major advising is usually excessive, though 36% said there are weeks when advising takes too much time (and 62% said it the time commitment is not excessive at all).

We asked about what kind of students faculty prefer to advise, and about 58% of faculty said they prefer students who intend to major in their field, or are at least interested in that field. Nonetheless, 88% said they were willing to advise students who have no intention of majoring in the faculty member’s field.

A variety of advising resources are available, and faculty seem to use all of them — the Bulletin, departments’ web sites, the Student Services web site, and faculty and staff colleagues. Gratifyingly, less than 1% of respondents said they generally couldn’t get their questions answered at all, though another 17% said they only got answers some of the time. Resources most in demand were descriptions of popular majors, including the requirements and the sequence of classes; information about which courses are accessible to first-years or to non-majors; a general overview of the curriculum and requirements; and details about all the technicalities and special cases in the requirements. Respondents overwhelmingly preferred written materials (64% of respondents) to videos or workshops. (Note this is a survey of A&S faculty: as the Engineering and SMFA curricula are quite different from the A&S curriculum, faculty advising those students will have different needs and desires.)
Here are some of the comments faculty made about the various advising models. About CAP classes, one colleague observed:

You see the advisees three hours each week and can develop a relationship with them.

Two respondents said “Students are put in CAP and then drop out of the course,” though; this is one of the problems EPC hopes to help solve.

About a Faculty Seminar class:

All my advisees shared an interest with each other and with me, and that gave us a connection, which is important in “pre-major” advising. Secondly, seeing the advisees as a group once a week gave me the opportunity to impart advising information at once without having to meet or interact individually. For example, when the pass/fail option was coming up, I could talk about why they might want to do that now or later. Thirdly, the students who selected my course shared my interests and 4 of the 14 of them became major advisees, a plus as then I had known them all 4 years. Finally, it gave me the opportunity to teach a class I wouldn’t have taught otherwise, which I enjoyed. I found this to be a winning way to advise and I wouldn’t want to do it any other way.

About host advising:

It makes sense just to be in the role of advisor, and not also a teacher, I think. I like having that separation.

These results confirm some of what we already suspected. EPC’s current work will strengthen the parts of advising that work well, while aiming to reduce some of the perceived problems. Under the proposed plan, incoming students will pre-register for classes over the summer, and will choose their advising course as part of this process, rather than as a separate task. We hope this will sharply reduce the number of students who drop the advising class before it even meets.

We are adding a new hybrid advising option, intended to give students the advantages of an advising class while allowing faculty to advise without having to give students a grade.

We also recommend that more faculty consider offering Faculty Seminar advising classes: one- or two-SHU classes (which can be pass/fail if you like), on any topic you like. Faculty have had success with Faculty Seminar classes that introduce a discipline, and with classes about how to learn in a given field, but they’ve also taught courses far from their normal academic areas, just for fun.

We will also work on documentation, not only for students but also for faculty; this work will be shared with the proposed new committee.