

THE SPECIAL MAJOR ADVISING HANDBOOK

Since 1970, The Special Major program at UB has enabled over 2500 students to graduate with majors that are a distinct measure of the student's creativity, resourcefulness, and intellectual maturity.

Each special major concentration is as unique as the individual student submitting the proposal. The special major gives undergraduate students the opportunity to fashion, from the vast curricular and faculty resources of the University, a major concentration which uniquely reflects the student's academic interests, abilities and aspirations.

The Advising Philosophy

A student whose educational/vocational goals cannot be fully realized within the curricula of existing departmental majors may present a completed special major proposal for review to the Special Major Committee. The proposal is a well thought out and deliberately formulated plan of study in which the student, in consultation with faculty sponsors, projects a supporting curriculum that will reflect and define the student's educational objectives at UB.

A student initiative requiring substantial preparation, this process includes investigating all curricular possibilities, and it presupposes a mature self-reflection on the part of the student concerning the academic challenge and intellectual purpose of the special major. Students who are not ready to clearly define the special major concentration may need to consult at length with an academic advisor, with appropriate faculty advisors, and with a Career Planning counselor in order to clarify and focus their academic intentions and to understand the academic resources and challenges at their disposal.

The student who feels ready to propose a special major should proceed to compose the Statement of Intent and Purpose (the special major rationale). The statement is then read by the Special Major Advisor and by prospective faculty sponsors who provide feedback and guidance before they endorse the proposal.

The Special Major Rationale

The Statement of Intent and Purpose serves as the main rationale for the special major. It introduces the major concentration to the reader and establishes the viability of the major concentration. The statement should demonstrate how the programmatic elements are tied together and should present a meaningful logic of aims and means that makes the special major cogent.

The special major integrates specific kinds of knowledge; it is not simply a collection of courses. The statement may include some biographic information that would give the reader an appreciation of the student's motivation concerning the selection of the special major option. The statement should specify the unique ways in which the curricular resources of the University are selected and combined in support of a central, unifying theme. It is necessary to include in the statement the relationship of the major courses to the proposal's title and the major's objectives.

The Statement of Intent and Purpose gives the student an opportunity to highlight the major's vocational and educational promise and potential.

The Major Curriculum

The courses within the major must clearly support the academic concentration as well as the special major title. The curriculum must reflect the major's educational purpose and the coursework must flow out of the rationale. The presented major coursework must contain breadth and depth. It should be interdisciplinary.

The curricular base for any special major is expansive, especially when one considers that the major courses not only include selections from the established undergraduate curriculum, but may include any relevant transfer coursework, credits for non-traditional or non-classroom educational activities, as well as educational experiences like study abroad programs, etc.

The special major lends itself to independent study projects, which can range from reading seminars, research projects and faculty tutorials to extensive internships in relevant university or community facilities. Each accredited non-classroom activity should be briefly described indicating the sponsor of the academic activity, the faculty person who is responsible for grading, and the process of evaluation for the non-classroom academic activity. All independent studies and internships must be described and approved on the independent study form.

University policy restricts the student to 18 credits of independent study/tutorial coursework that can count towards the 120 credits required for the BA or BS degree. It is recommended that no more than a quarter of the credits comprising the special major be independent study/tutorial credits.

In the case of internships in health care facilities, the student must submit evidence that the facility is prepared to accept the student for the purpose of the internship, and an appropriate member of the staff of the facility must be designated as the supervisor of the student's activities. The student should also submit a plan for evaluating the field experience.

All courses transferred to UB from other schools must be formally designated and identified. Transfer courses may comprise no more than 50% of the major curriculum.

The number of credit hours in the special major concentration will vary considerably, depending upon the type of program being developed. The minimum number of credit hours allowed within the major concentration is 36 credit hours for a BA. Most concentrations exceed this minimum requirement. The BS degree requires substantially more credits to reflect the extensive research and technical components of this degree option. A substantial number of upper division coursework is necessary for the special major, especially for the BS degree option. The Special Major Committee expects a balance between lower and upper division courses, reflecting both breadth and depth.

Students who are pursuing special majors as a double major or double degree with another department are limited as to the number of course they may use in common for both majors. As a general rule, no more than two courses may be double-counted toward both majors.

Faculty Sponsorship

Every special major proposal must be sponsored by two university faculty members holding tenure-track positions. Adjunct and part-time faculty are not permitted. The degree of faculty interaction in the proposal's formulation varies. Ideally, the student should seek faculty advice early in the formulation of the major. The student should present a rough draft of the Statement of Intent and Purpose to prospective sponsors for their review and guidance. The sponsors should assist the student in projecting a curriculum that supports the major's programmatic theme.

It is important that the faculty sponsors provide their guidance and expertise in developing the special major proposal. The faculty sponsors must evaluate the quality and integrity of the proposal before it is submitted for committee review. Their support must be formally declared on the Faculty Sponsor Agreement which is an integral part of the proposal. Faculty sponsors are required to comment on the merits of the proposal at the time they sign the Faculty Sponsor Agreement.

If one of the faculty sponsors leaves the university with two or more semesters remaining for graduation, it is the responsibility of the student to find another sponsor. The new sponsor must submit a Faculty Sponsor Agreement form that becomes a part of the proposal. If one of the sponsors leaves the university with one semester remaining before graduation, the remaining sponsor may serve as sole sponsor of the approved program of study. Faculty on sabbatical and emeritus faculty of the university may sponsor special majors. Faculty sponsors must endorse any changes to the major concentration after the proposal has been approved.

Occasionally, students may submit proposals where one of the sponsors has a university affiliation other than the unqualified faculty rank (i.e., tenure track). In such cases, a curriculum vitae must be submitted, substantiating the sponsor's competency to undertake the sponsorship.

Presenting the Proposal

After receiving general approval from the faculty sponsors, following their suggestions and recommendations, the student should finalize his or her proposal. This requires completing the special major application, refining the rationale, making certain that all coursework is shown, and entering all credit for coursework under the appropriate headings.

The proposal must reflect every course and every credit that will comprise the undergraduate degree program. Proposals must be typed using the online application.

The completed proposal including the signed Faculty Sponsor Agreement must be submitted to the Chair of the Special Major Committee who, after reviewing the proposal with the student, forwards the proposal to the Special Major Committee.

The committee includes faculty members representing the four principal undergraduate academic areas: Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Physical and Mathematical Sciences, and the Health Sciences. The committee reviews each proposal to ensure that the major is academically sound and meets University standards.

The committee generally meets three times each semester. **Proposals must be submitted to the Chair of the Committee no later than two weeks prior to each meeting.** Meeting times are available from the Special Major Chair in the CAS office in 275 Park Hall and on the Special Major web page. The committee, after reviewing the proposal, can recommend one of four possible actions: approval, provisional approval, deferral, or rejection.

Approved proposals are sent to the Dean immediately for signature, and the student is officially entered in University records as a Special Studies candidate if approved.

If the proposal is Provisionally Approved, the student must make the necessary adjustments and resubmit the revised proposal to the Chair of the committee, who in turn will recommend the proposal to the Dean for final approval.

When the proposal is Deferred, it requires substantial re-working and needs to be resubmitted for the committee's re-evaluation.

A proposal that is Rejected is one that is without merit. This action is rare and the student would have to reformulate the entire major concentration.

Miscellaneous Notes

- The ideal time to submit a proposal is during the sophomore year or early in the junior year. This would give the student ample time to work with the faculty sponsors in the planning of the major curriculum prior to submission of the proposal. **Submitting proposals in the last semester of the student's matriculation or submitting proposals after the completion of all coursework violates the special major's essential deliberative and consultative nature. The committee is not obliged to consider proposals which are submitted *ex post facto*.** Any proposal submitted in the student's last semester must be accompanied by a petition explaining the late submission. It is to the student's benefit to have the sponsors support the petition.
- A minimum 2.00 GPA in both the major concentration and the overall academic record is required for submission.
- Special majors are restricted to BA or BS degrees.
- **The special major may not duplicate any existing degree program in the university. Special majors cannot be used to propose academic concentrations similar to existing university programs with the intention of circumventing specific requirements.**
- Special majors cannot be proposed in health sciences or any other areas where certification or licensure is required by state or professional boards of accreditation.
- Special majors may not suggest that the student is acquiring professional competence as a therapist. Major concentrations titled Art Therapy, Psychotherapy, etc. are prohibited.
- Once the proposal is approved, all changes to the proposal must be recorded on a change form. Changes to the major concentration must be approved by the faculty sponsors and the special major advisor.
- In advising special major students, the focus or direction of the major curriculum should be carefully examined to include the following considerations:
 - a) A major having a singular vocational focus with very specific applications may not be advantageous for the student. The vocational versatility and promise of the special major degree program should be determined with the assistance of career guidance.
 - b) Academic concentrations which combine two distinct disciplines, e.g., Bio-engineering or Arts Management, should observe and reflect the academic standards of the respective disciplines. The committee also expects such academic concentrations to have the full approval of qualified faculty from the respective academic areas.

- If you have difficulty composing the Statement of Intent, ask for help. It is worth remembering that your proposal will be read not only by the Special Major committee, but also by prospective employers and/or graduate school admissions committees.
- **Approval of a special major does not guarantee access to courses from departments that limit their enrollments to majors only. It is the student's responsibility to negotiate with the respective departments for those restricted courses which are integral to the proposed major concentration.**
- It is important that you review the proposal with your faculty sponsors and with the chair of the committee before submitting it for committee review.
- If your proposal has been provisionally approved, you must make the necessary corrections and revisions and submit these to the Chair of the committee **in the same semester** in which the committee took action on your proposal.
- **It is the student's responsibility to file an Application for Graduation by published deadlines in order to graduate as a special major.**

Recent Special Major Titles (submitted and approved)

Comparative Literature
 Colonialism, Politics and Critical Theory
 Japanese Language and Culture
 Health Care Administration
 Music Business
 Anthropological Anatomy and Physiology
 Nutrition Science
 Journalism and New Media
 Environmental Health Sciences
 Film Analysis and Popular Culture
 Animal Science
 Animal Behavior and Conservation
 Narrative Design in Multimedia
 Mathematical Finance
 Pharmaceutical Sales
 Latino Studies
 Law and Information Technology
 Advertising Communications
 Community Theater
 Religious Studies: Worldview and Apocalypse
 Chinese Language as Cultural Translation
 The Psychology of Sports and Fitness
 Middle Eastern Studies: Anthropological Perspectives
 Still and Motion Picture Photography
 Social Web Media and Design