

PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUALLY DESIGNED MAJORS

The Individually Designed Major program (IDM) is overseen by the School of Humanities and Sciences, located in Building 1. See also the “School of Earth Sciences” and the “School of Engineering” sections of this bulletin for IDMs in these curriculum areas.

This program is intended for currently registered undergraduates in good academic standing interested in pursuing an area of scholarly inquiry that falls outside the purview of an established academic department or program of the University. Students submit proposals for consideration by the Curriculum Committee. These should be intellectually coherent majors designed by the students themselves, with the assistance of faculty members of their choice. IDM students are required to complete a capstone requirement either as an honors project or a senior project. Information about proposal procedures, and the procedure for an honors project, is available at the Undergraduate Advising Center, Sweet Hall, first floor, and the School of Humanities and Sciences (Building 1).

In designing a major, the student consults with three faculty members (all must be Academic Council members and be from three separate departments); one of the faculty members is selected as the student’s primary adviser. In helping the student design the major and in signing the proposal requesting approval from the Curriculum Committee, the faculty members are committing themselves to act as a regular academic advisory group for the student until graduation. The committee does not consider proposals without the approval of the faculty advisory group.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE AND CURRICULUM COMMITTEE REVIEW

The program is administered by the Curriculum Committee, the School of Humanities and Sciences, and the dean’s office in the School of Humanities and Sciences. Applications are due by the fifth week of the Spring Quarter of the sophomore year.

The committee acts in lieu of a regular department of the University. This role involves certifying the scholarly merit of the program and includes the obligation to consider, approve, and recommend changes in each proposed major.

In carrying out its role, the committee reserves the right to reject proposals that, in its opinion, lack scholarly merit or are not clearly interdisciplinary. Occasionally, the committee must reject a proposal that, though of considerable academic merit, requires resources not available at Stanford. The committee also reserves the right to recommend additions to a student’s faculty advisory group.

ADVISING AND PROPOSAL

Students who are interested in the program and have met with an adviser at Undergraduate Advising, are directed to the dean’s office in the School of Humanities and Sciences to speak with the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs. The final stage of the process is the application review by the Curriculum Committee.

The proposal should begin with a statement that describes the major, articulates the motivation for and the justification and ultimate goal of the major, and shows how the courses listed relate to and fulfill the major’s goal. This statement should be followed by a list of the proposed core courses to be counted toward the major and, as far as possible, the sequence in which they are to be taken. The proposal must be signed by the selected faculty advisory group; their signatures certify that they endorse the major as described in the proposal and agree to serve as the student’s permanent advisory group. The proposal must be accompanied by a letter of recommendation from each of the three advisers giving separate appraisals of the academic viability of the proposed major. The proposal must also include a current copy of the student’s unofficial transcript.

These requirements are in addition to the general guidelines discussed under “The Major” section of this bulletin. The monitoring of the requirements and subsequent changes to the original proposal must be approved by the Cognizant Dean for Graduate and Undergraduate Studies.

THE GUIDELINES

To establish the IDM program as being fully equivalent to a Stanford B.A. or B.S. degree in an established department or program, the Senate of the Academic Council has approved specific requirements. The criteria for approval of proposals submitted include:

1. Each major shall consist of at least 75 units, all in courses at or above the 100 level (or their equivalent).
2. A maximum of 5 units of these 75 units may be taken on a credit/no credit basis.
3. A maximum of 8 units of these 75 units may be taken in practical or directed reading.
4. None of the 75 units can count towards another major or other special program.
5. Students are required to take a core sequence and WIM course in the department of one of their advisers.
6. There is a grade point requirement of 3.5.
7. The proposed major must constitute a coherent academic program that fulfills the student’s objectives and achieves a clear academic goal.
8. The proposed major must be comparable in quality and in academic rigor to degrees obtained by students in other degree-granting programs offered at Stanford.
9. The proposed major must achieve both breadth and depth within the academic discipline(s), involve interdisciplinary study, and be compatible with a liberal arts education.
10. The proposed major must not duplicate or be achievable through a major already offered by another degree-granting program or department.
11. Students must present evidence that demonstrates their ability to do independent work.
12. Students proposing individually designed majors must have at least three full quarters of undergraduate work remaining at Stanford after the date on which the proposal is approved by the committee.