Guidelines for the Self-Designed Interdisciplinary Studies Major

Understanding and seeking answers to complex issues often requires integrating knowledge and methods drawn from the natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities.

Students who design a liberal arts interdisciplinary major should want to study a problem, question, or area of knowledge using and integrating multiple disciplinary approaches.

A self-designed major contains 12-15 units.

Faculty advisors play an important role in working with students to design and implement these majors.

Recent self-designed interdisciplinary majors have included:

Chinese Studies

Anthropology of Religion

Musical Direction for the Theater
I. The Interdisciplinary Studies Program and Committee

The Interdisciplinary Studies program enables Beloit College students to explore and address complex issues through inquiry between and beyond disciplinary boundaries. In this program, students analyze and synthesize information from multiple perspectives and construct new forms of knowledge. The interdisciplinary offerings include courses, program-supported majors, and self-design majors and minors.

The Interdisciplinary Studies (IDST) Committee supervises the interdisciplinary major and minor program, and consists of an academic dean or associate dean, three additional faculty members, and one student. Students interested in designing an IDST major should contact the Provost’s office. The Committee approves or rejects interdisciplinary major and minor proposals after their approval by the faculty members consenting to serve as advisors.

II. Application Deadlines and Eligibility

1. Students may submit proposals as early as their third semester, but no later than four weeks after classes begin in their fifth semester. (Proposal submission in the fifth semester is generally discouraged, and students wishing to do so should have a backup major in case the proposal is not approved.)

2. The deadline for application is four weeks before the last day of classes if the application is to be acted on that semester.

3. Since an interdisciplinary major requires well-developed integrative skills and significant independent work, students who wish to propose such a major will have demonstrated academic ability beyond minimum competence. At the time of application, students must have at least a 3.0 GPA.

4. While the committee will normally adhere to these eligibility guidelines, it also recognizes that students may have individual experiences and/or extenuating circumstances that justify adhering to the spirit, rather than the rule, of these guidelines. The committee reserves the right to exercise judgment in such cases.

III. Procedures

Each student who wishes to pursue an IDST major needs to:

1. Consult the Provost’s Office to learn about the application process, and to discuss the possible shape of the proposal. This constitutes the beginning of the application process for purposes of eligibility, and should happen sometime during the third
2. Consult two faculty advisors who will agree to supervise the major. These advisors should assist the student in planning the major and preparing the proposal. Initial consultation with these advisors should occur during the third semester, or the fourth semester at the latest.

3. Submit a preliminary proposal to the Provost’s Office no later than **four weeks after classes begin in the fifth semester** (see section V for instruction on the proposal). Letters of support from the student’s faculty advisors (see section IV for instruction on advisors) should also be sent to the Provost’s Office by this deadline. The IDST Committee will accept or reject the proposal, or ask for revisions. If the proposal is approved, the Chair of the IDST Committee will send a statement of acceptance to the student, the student’s advisors and the Registrar. A copy of the successful proposal will go into the student’s advising file and will be sent to each advisor.

4. If course substitutions for the approved major must be made in any given semester, the student must submit the proposed changes to the Provost’s Office for approval prior to registration. Submit proposed changes as early as possible. Because of the quick turnaround between the release of the schedule of classes and registration, proposed changes can be fast-tracked through the Committee under some circumstances.

5. Complete a capstone project (usually by taking IDST 390) in the junior and/or senior year. The student must submit evidence of this capstone experience to the Provost’s Office for review by the IDST Committee two weeks before classes end in the semester that the student intends to graduate (see section VI on graduation).

### IV. Advisors

Students planning to propose an interdisciplinary major must select two advisors. The advisors will work closely with the student, and in consultation with one another, in developing the proposal, supervising the work done, and certifying the completion of the major and other general education graduation requirements. Faculty members willing to serve as advisors for an IDST major shall send a letter indicating such support to the Provost’s Office at the same time that the student submits the proposal. The Provost’s Office will also receive from the Registrar an advising folder for each student whose proposal is accepted.

Advisors’ specific responsibilities are described in the Faculty Agreement Form, which is to be signed by each advisor once the student’s proposal is accepted.
V. The Proposal

1. In preparing final proposals, students should keep in close touch with their intended advisors and should have each advisor send a supporting letter to the Provost’s Office indicating agreement to work with the applicant through to completion of the proposed major.

2. The proposed major should have a descriptive and appropriate title. This title will appear on the student’s transcript.

3. An abstract of one page should introduce the proposal. The abstract should answer as precisely as possible the question, “What is the essence of this proposal?” The abstract should include:
   a. Title of the proposed major.
   b. Names of advisors.
   c. A one or two-paragraph statement of goals and objectives containing a precise indication of the focus and intentions of the major.

4. A conceptual rationale should cover the total interdisciplinary major plan and experience. This substantive essay should describe and explicate the proposed major. The rationale should:
   a. State how the proposed major is consistent with the liberal arts.
   b. Explain how the proposed major will integrate and reflect on the disciplines.
   c. Tie together the various components of the proposed major, with attention to the achievement of breadth and depth and the ways in which particular courses advance the goals of the major.
   d. Explain how the proposed major can be supported by faculty, library, studio, etc., resources at Beloit College.
   e. Propose a capstone experience that will synthesize and integrate the broad range of knowledge acquired in the process of completing the major.
f. Explain why departmental concentrations (including a major, minor, or combination of majors and minors) would not serve the student’s intellectual goals.

5. A list of courses should include all courses pertaining to the proposed major. These courses should reflect depth as well as breadth. Courses should number between 12 and 15 units in total. (A proposal that includes mostly 100-level courses is unlikely to be approved.) Students are advised to pay particular attention to pre-requisites for courses chosen, as these will not be waived. Special project courses should be listed under appropriate departmental programs together with the names of instructors who will supervise them. Special projects’ instructors should indicate their willingness to supervise these courses if they are not the advisors of the major. Up to three units of special project work may count toward the major.

6. No more than five units may already be completed at the time the application process begins.

7. A proposed term-by-term course schedule should list all the courses that will satisfy graduation requirements. Course scheduling will be subject to change, but the plans should be as specific as possible, including approved special projects. Specify course names and course numbers from the catalog.

8. A copy of the academic transcript must be included.

9. If there are extenuating circumstances regarding your proposal that you believe the committee should consider, please explicitly describe them. These should also be addressed by your advisors in their letters of support.

Note: Please date the proposal, and if revisions are requested, provide a new date for each new version of the proposal. Be sure to include your name.

VI. Graduation

During the last semester of study, the student completing an IDST major will:

1. Summarize in writing the academic substance of the IDST major.

2. Evaluate in writing the IDST major experience, describing its range and its conclusions.

3. Prepare a portfolio of all work relevant to the IDST major, including evidence of capstone experience and items (1) and (2) above. Evidence of capstone experience may take many forms, including a copy of the paper written, a copy of the exhibit catalog, or any other version of what the student produced during this capstone experience.
4. Submit the portfolio to the advisors and request evaluation letters from them.

5. Send the portfolio along with the advisors’ evaluation letters to the Provost’s Office **two weeks before classes end** in the semester that the student plans to graduate.

Students are strongly discouraged from attempting to “double count” courses toward a second major or minor. Any double-counting will require approval by the IDST Committee.

Transfer courses (including those taken abroad) may count toward the IDST major, with the approval of the Provost and the student’s advisors.

Copies of the student’s approved proposal, final evaluation, and all other relevant material will be kept on file in the Provost’s Office.

Students who are completing self-designed IDST majors may graduate with Honors. At the end of the sixth semester, the IDST Committee will solicit nominating letters from advisors. By the beginning of the seventh semester, the advisors should send the nominating letters to the Committee if the student is to be considered for graduation with Honors. The Committee will determine who will receive Honors by evaluating the student’s portfolio of work, the nominating letters, and the student’s transcript.

Graduating seniors who have demonstrated excellence in their self-designed IDST majors are eligible to be considered for the Interdisciplinary Studies Prize (announced at the Honors Day ceremony). The IDST Committee will select recipients.

*(revised November 2016)*