Guidelines for the Individually Designed Interdisciplinary Major  
(revised January 2014; amended May 2014 and October 2020)

GENERAL INFORMATION:

The individually designed interdisciplinary major is an option for students whose interests are truly interdisciplinary and who wish to pursue areas of inquiry not currently addressed by existing majors. Students desiring to design their own majors must submit a proposal to the Committee on Individual Programs for review and approval.

A completed proposal consists of the course plan (a list of proposed courses totaling 48 hours); a written rationale for the major; and a signed copy of the Declaration of Major form. The student must have identified and met with the faculty adviser, who will offer advice and guidance for the individually designed major, and obtained his or her signature before submitting the forms to the Office of Undergraduate Education in 350 Buttrick Hall.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:

This plan permits students to contract for an individually designed program of concentration consisting of at least 48 credit hours of approved work. The program is constructed around a coherent academic purpose and may draw together the academic resources of a number of departments and schools. The program’s purpose may include topical, period, or area studies, and must be consistent with the philosophy underlying a liberal arts education (see “What Is Liberal Education?” in the Undergraduate Catalog). The program should not be designed with a focus on pre-professional training (e.g., pre-business, pre-law, or pre-medicine). The student may be required to achieve a standard of proficiency in appropriately related areas such as foreign languages or mathematics in addition to the 48 credit hours constituting the program of concentration.

Each student must identify a major adviser who will offer advice and guidance. The major adviser must be a professor or full-time principal senior lecturer or senior lecturer.

The student’s course plan for an individually designed interdisciplinary major is a statement of required courses. Furthermore, because of the nature of interdisciplinary majors, all courses that have previously been included in the student’s course plan are considered to be part of the major discipline. The student must achieve at least a 2.000 grade point average in all courses that are (or have been) part of the contract.

PROCEDURE:

1. Study the course listings in the Undergraduate Catalog.
2. Prepare a tentative list of courses for inclusion in the major.
3. Draft a preliminary version of your rationale.
4. Meet with your faculty adviser to review your proposed courses and rationale. Meeting with the chair of the Committee on Individual Programs is highly recommended.

5. Obtain your faculty adviser’s signature on the final version of your course plan and Major Declaration Form.

6. Submit your proposal materials by the deadline (usually, by noon several days in advance of a meeting of the Committee on Individual Programs). Contact the Office of Undergraduate Education in 350 Buttrick Hall for current deadlines and submission procedures.

Students whose proposals do not meet the standards for acceptable individually designed interdisciplinary majors may be required to meet with the chair of the Committee on Individual Programs before their proposal can be considered by the Committee.

Once the Committee has met, you will be notified of its decision (approval, approval with changes, resubmission with revisions, or rejection) by email. If you are asked to resubmit, the Committee may require that you meet with its chair to discuss strategies for revising and strengthening your proposal.

WRITTEN RATIONALE:

The rationale should be at least two pages (double-spaced) in length and include the following:

- A statement explaining why existing majors do not meet your needs;
- A description of the area you wish to pursue and why it is a valid or relevant subject for study within the context of the liberal arts and sciences;
- An explanation of the relevance of particular courses;
- A discussion of how the proposed courses cohere; and
- A discussion of how this major prepares you for your post-graduate study or long-term goals.

COURSES:

Individually designed interdisciplinary majors consist of 48 hours (usually, 16 courses) and may include only three introductory-level courses. However, some departments and programs, like History and Music Literature, offer a considerable number of introductory-level courses, so courses from these programs are not counted against the three introductory-level course limit.

Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credit may not count towards the 48 hours required for the major. Independent Studies, Directed Readings, or research courses may be included, but your proposal must contain a specific description of their subject matter.

If your proposed major is approved, you will be required to complete the courses listed in your course plan in order to fulfill the major requirements. If you find it necessary in the future to amend your course plan because of schedule conflicts or other reasons, you must submit the
requested changes to the Office of Undergraduate Education with your faculty adviser’s written approval.

ADVISER:

Each student must identify a major adviser who will offer advice and guidance. The major adviser must be a professor or full-time principal senior lecturer or senior lecturer. It is preferable to choose an instructor with whom you have worked in the past and one with expertise in one of the fields related to your interests. Faculty are not required to agree to advise students with individually designed interdisciplinary majors.

TITLE:

The title of the major must be short and illustrative of the true content of the major. Below are examples of titles from recent individually designed interdisciplinary majors:

- International Political Economy
- Urban Economics and Policy
- French and the Creative Arts
- Human Biology and Public Health
- Studies in Human Ecology
- Middle Eastern Studies
- Health and Literature

FORMS:

- Declaration of Major: [https://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/documents/UGRD-major-change2.pdf](https://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/documents/UGRD-major-change2.pdf)
- Interdisciplinary Major Course Plan: [https://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Contract%20for%20Interdisciplinary%20Major.pdf](https://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Contract%20for%20Interdisciplinary%20Major.pdf)
- Request for Change in Contract for Interdisciplinary Major: [https://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Request%20for%20Change%20in%20Contract%20for%20Interdisciplinary%20Major.pdf](https://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Request%20for%20Change%20in%20Contract%20for%20Interdisciplinary%20Major.pdf)