Thank you for mentoring a student who is completing a Special Interdisciplinary Major (SIM). The SIM is designed to provide students with an opportunity to examine, in significant depth, an academic area that falls outside of or between the academic departments as they are constituted in the Columbian College and across the University. These guidelines will help you support the student throughout his/her SIM requirements at GW.

Guidelines and Curriculum of the Major

A SIM must encompass a significant area of academic inquiry, and a student is expected to design a curriculum that provides the breadth of scope and depth of a traditional major by combining courses from two or more existing departments.

SIM proposals must show that the student is seeking to achieve an academic purpose that cannot be accomplished through a combination of existing majors and minors. Recent successful proposals have included: Latin American and Latino Culture and Politics, Political Psychology, Cognitive Neuroscience, International Development and Conflict Resolution, Computational Biology, and Arts Administration.

The proposed major should consist of the following core requirements:

1) A minimum of 36 and a maximum of 54 hours of upper-level coursework, including both required and elective courses
2) A minimum of 45 credit hours must be taken within the Columbian College
3) If relevant, at least one course in research skills is recommended
4) The successful completion of CCAS 4191: Special Interdisciplinary Capstone

Duties and Responsibilities of the Faculty Mentor

The faculty mentor should oversee the creation of the student’s curriculum, serve as an advisor to the student and approve any substitutions or changes to the curriculum, as well as review and grade the student’s capstone project, very often a thesis.

The faculty mentor is asked to submit a letter of support of the student’s goals and proposed curriculum as part of the completed proposal to the Undergraduate Studies committee. The faculty mentor must have expertise in the area of the proposed major and should also help the student to form a committee of at least two additional faculty members to oversee the student’s progress. Only full-time faculty in the Columbian College may serve as mentors for a SIM, though faculty in other positions may serve on the committee.

Since there is no academic department to support the student’s major, the faculty mentor should expect to be present for the duration of the student’s enrollment. The faculty mentor should also be available to meet with the student each semester to track the student’s progress towards the completion of the major curriculum.
The Proposal

Completed proposals should include the following:

1) A title (no more than 30 characters) that describes the major. This title will appear on the transcript and diploma.
2) An explanatory essay of no more than 1,000 words which presents a rationale for the major that considers both the student's goals and the cohesiveness of the curriculum. The essay should address why the special interdisciplinary major has academic value and why existing majors or combinations of majors and minors do not meet its objectives, and place the interdisciplinary major in an academic context. The essay should discuss the contribution of each set of courses to the overall concept of the major as well as be explicit as to which degree the student is pursuing; Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science
3) A completed plan of study form specifically for the major curriculum
4) A completed four year plan that identifies all coursework required to complete the undergraduate degree including major, general education curriculum, and any coursework for a minor (if the student wishes to complete one)
5) A statement describing the capstone project and the names of the faculty members who will participate in creating and evaluating the final assignment
6) Letters of support and recommendation from the primary faculty mentor and each committee member. The primary advisor should comment specifically on the capstone project.

Once the proposal has been submitted, the Undergraduate Studies Committee may do one of the following:

1) Approve the proposal in its entirety
2) Make suggestions for modification
3) Stipulate specific revisions
4) Reject the proposed program of study

Once a decision has been made, the faculty mentor and the student will be notified by the Undergraduate Studies Office. Should a proposal only need minor modifications, the student can submit the changes, which will get relayed to the committee for approval immediately. However, if the proposal needs substantial revisions, the student will need to consult the faculty mentor to make any necessary changes and submit the proposal for review at the following Undergraduate Studies Committee meeting.

Approved Proposal

Before each registration period, the student should meet with the faculty mentor to discuss the following semester's schedule of classes and make any adjustments to the major curriculum. If any changes are made, then the student should submit an updated plan of study to their professional academic advisor.