

Special Interdisciplinary Major (SIM) Guidelines – Faculty Mentors



Arts &
Sciences

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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. Every SIM will have a committee of faculty members who will support the student and assess the final deliverables. These guidelines will help the faculty support the student throughout their 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 (2000-level and above), including both required and elective courses
- 2) A minimum of 45 credit hours must be taken within the Columbian College
- 3) At least one course in research skills is recommended, to prepare for the Capstone project
- 4) The successful completion of CCAS 4191: Special Interdisciplinary Capstone, which includes a successful Capstone defense before the faculty committee, to be held in the last month of the intended graduation term

Duties and Responsibilities of the Faculty Committee and Mentor

A faculty committee with three to five mentors, and one of them serving as the primary mentor for the proposed major, should oversee the creation of the student's curriculum, serve as advisors to the student, and approve any changes to the curriculum, as well as support, review and grade the student's Capstone project and deliverables.

The faculty committee members must have a combined expertise covering the main areas from which the curriculum will be drawn. They are faculty members in the Columbian College who will be present for the duration of the student's enrollment, and the primary mentor must be full-time regular faculty. Each committee member must submit a letter of support of the student's goals and proposed curriculum as part of the completed proposal to the CCAS Undergraduate Studies committee.

The faculty mentor will be the primary faculty point of contact for the SIM, make sure that the student is well supported by the faculty committee, and should 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
- 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 1-2 page statement describing the capstone project and the names of the faculty members who will participate in creating and evaluating the final assignment. The student's capstone proposal should include a strong capstone statement with a clear research question (or questions) and a timeline for completing the project. Furthermore, the student's research questions and plan should include a methodology and hypothesis, etc. The proposal also needs to state what kinds of information will gathered, from where, and how this information will be used to address the questions motivating the proposal.
- 6) Letters of support and recommendation from each faculty committee member, commenting on the merit and feasibility of the SIM, and the feasibility of the Capstone project; and indicating their level of involvement and full support for the student's pursuit of the SIM. The primary faculty mentor will additionally commit to their role as primary faculty point of contact for the SIM.

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

Approved Proposal

Before each registration period, the student should meet with the primary 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 to the faculty committee of the SIM, and after their approval to the student's CCAS academic advisor.