

**Carnegie Mellon University**  
Dietrich College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

**Student-Defined Major Program: Frequently Asked Questions**

*QUESTION: How do I begin the process of developing a student-defined major or minor proposal?*

In general, the best way to begin the process is to read through these guidelines, perhaps discuss your ideas further with your academic advisor, as well as faculty with expertise relevant to the proposed program, prepare a preliminary proposal draft, submit this draft to the Dietrich College Student-Defined Program director, and then make an appointment to meet the program director to discuss your proposal. Proposals are submitted online, as an MS.Word file, to Dr. Joseph Devine, program director ([jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu)). Appointments with Dr. Devine may be made through the Dietrich College Dean's Office, either in person (Baker Hall 154) or by phone (412-268-2831).

*QUESTION: When is it appropriate, or recommended, to begin the process of developing a Dietrich College student-defined major or minor proposal? How late can this process be initiated and completed?*

Typically, interested students begin to discuss and develop proposals late in their first year or early in the sophomore year. Efforts that begin earlier than this often suffer from the relative lack of experience, insights and perspective that the full first year provides. Initiatives that begin *later* than the sophomore year (or even *late during* the sophomore year) suffer from the pressures of time to develop a successful proposal in time to start a fall junior year course schedule, with the hope of still graduating on time (i.e., after one's eighth semester). Generally, the further one is beyond the latter part of the sophomore year, the less the college will encourage a student to pursue a student-defined major option, and the less likely a proposal will be approved.

Proposals must be approved no later than one academic year prior to the student's expected graduation date.

*QUESTION: If I am not a Dietrich College student, am I eligible to enter this program?*

Yes. But the steps to be taken vary slightly depending on whether the proposed program is for a student-defined primary major, or a student-defined additional major or minor.

Students in this program pursuing a student-defined major as a *primary major* must be Dietrich College students. Non-Dietrich College students interested in a Dietrich student-

defined *primary* major follow the steps for developing and submitting a program proposal for review and approval. If approved, the student would then be required to apply for internal transfer to Dietrich College (instructions for which can be found [here](#)). Once approved for internal transfer, the student would be “declared” and coded as a Dietrich College Student-Defined primary major.

If a student’s proposal is for a Dietrich College student-defined *additional* major, or minor, no change of primary college or major is required.

*QUESTION: How long does it take to develop a successful proposal? How difficult is it to have one approved?*

The process for developing a student-defined program proposal can be long and rigorous. On average, successful proposals have taken from as little as a few weeks, and as much as several months.

*QUESTION: What if I want to begin (or if I am in the middle of) this process around registration days? Should I register for a set of courses that fit my proposed program, even if my proposal has not yet been approved?*

In general, until and unless your proposal has been approved and you have entered the Dietrich College student-defined program, you should follow the curriculum requirements of your current college and major.