

Carnegie Mellon University

Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Student-Defined Program: Proposal Guidelines and Procedures

Proposal Format and Content

In their general appearance, student-defined major or minor proposals should resemble the format used in the university catalog to profile any of the college's majors or minors. Each student-defined major or minor proposal draft should be double-spaced, with 1.5-inch margins, and should include the following:

Cover Page

- The proposed program title
- An indication of whether the proposed student-defined program is for a
 - Primary major - Indicate whether the degree would be a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree.
 - Additional major
 - Minor
- Your name
- Andrew ID
- Email address
- Current class, college and major
- Estimated month and year of graduation
- Draft date
- You should also include (below the signature boxes) the names of those who will review your proposal (i.e., the college's Student-Defined Program director, plus other faculty and administrators with content expertise and authority relevant to the proposed program).

Introduction

- A brief, one-paragraph statement that you propose to pursue a student-defined major or minor in "_____ " (preliminary title), and identify the areas of study that you will combine to form this program.
- State your educational objectives for this major or minor, and why you feel that it is not possible for you to attain these objectives in the context of existing programs in Dietrich College or elsewhere in the university.
- If the proposal is for a Dietrich student-defined *primary* major, indicate whether this major will be a bachelor of science or a bachelor of arts (refer to the Dietrich College section of the university catalog for these distinctions).

Major Description and Rationale

- This is a clear, concise presentation of the proposed program's organizing ideas and content. "Definitions" are usually necessary here for "the field" of study reflected in the proposed major or minor. (What, in other words, *is* this field of study, and what subfields combine to form it?)
- Next, in prose form, describe the program content in more detail. Break it down into categories and sub-categories that will also later be reflected in the proposed program's curriculum. Describe and explain the role and importance of each program category in the larger context of the proposed program. It should also be clear which areas of study are "primary" to the major or minor, and which are "subsidiary," and why.
- As part of your development of this program proposal, you are expected to have researched and provide descriptions of comparable programs at peer institutions, and to use these as benchmarks for the rationale, content and curriculum of the program you are proposing.
- In addition, you must establish again, this time in greater detail, why your educational objectives in this major or minor are not attainable through any one or combination of existing major or minor programs in the college or university.
- Additional Tips:
 - *Precision* and *clarity* are essential in the proposal. Remember that it is probably the case that you envision a complex and synthetic major or minor that the reader does not, but it is *the reader* who must be persuaded that this is a coherent proposal. Do not be sparing in the detail offered to describe the program's central organizing ideas, how these ideas relate to each other, and how the courses in the curriculum operationalize these ideas.
 - If you make statements that different fields of study reinforce or complement each other, *explain* this relationship (and give examples). Do not make the reader work harder than he or she should to decipher the synthesis you are presenting. Otherwise, the reader will almost certainly *say* that he or she does not understand, pass it back, and ask for another draft.
 - Proofread your draft carefully. Drafts with misspellings, incomplete sentences, or non-sequiturs will receive a quick and chilly reception. Taking time to do this carefully and clearly will save you time in the end.

Curriculum

- This is a complete presentation of all courses that will comprise the requirements for the major or minor. These courses should be categorized to reflect the program framework previously presented.
- Within each curriculum category, be sure to indicate which courses are

"required," and which are "distributional," and why. "Distributional" means referring to a list of selected courses.

- Relatedly, be sure that the curriculum reflects the same emphases stressed in the program description and rationale. For example, if in the rationale you argue that a major in "East Asian Studies" stresses breadth of national and cultural foci, make sure that courses listed under this category are comparably broad (e.g., not just Chinese history).
- You will also be asked to present your proposed program's curriculum in the larger context of your other requirements and course work (i.e., general education requirements, requirements for other majors and minors you are pursuing, and free electives).

Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

There are **five** critical issues that you must address in a student-defined major or minor proposal. These issues comprise perhaps the most important set of criteria used in evaluating student-defined proposals. These issues (and examples of the questions used in evaluating proposals to probe these issues) are:

1. Coherence. Do all of the major's or minor's intellectual components, when taken together, comprise a coherent program of study? Are there complementary central themes to which each category makes unique contributions, avoiding any obvious gaps? Does the proposed major or minor avoid the appearance of being rather more like a smorgasbord of unrelated (or distantly related) areas of study? Does the proposed major or minor have notable gaps in its foci?
2. Suitability as a Dietrich College Major or Minor. Almost by definition, student-defined majors or minors are interdisciplinary, and often include courses from outside the college. However, in order to be acceptable as a *Dietrich College* student-defined major or minor, the program of study must, in its essence, be a program that has an intellectual "home" in Dietrich College. In other words, the program of study must make sense as something that Dietrich College would sponsor, and cannot at its core be an interdisciplinary program that does not reflect any significant intellectual component of the college (i.e., the humanities, the social sciences, or the behavioral sciences). One rule of thumb used in this regard is the expectation that at least half of the proposed program's courses (including courses at advanced levels) should be Dietrich College courses.

Another related issue that sometimes arises is when a proposed program that draws substantially on content areas housed in one or more other CMU colleges. In such cases, it is usually necessary to consult these other colleges as

“stakeholders” in the proposed program, and to see if they have any objections or recommendations regarding the portions of the proposed program that would draw on their expertise and resources.

3. *Suitability as a student-defined major or minor.* As noted earlier, you must persuasively explain why it is not possible to accomplish the educational objectives of the proposed major or minor through one or more of the existing programs in the college or university.
4. *Viability.* Given available faculty, courses, and other resources, is the proposed major or minor a viable course of study? For example, are the program's “required courses” offered regularly, and will you be able to take them (i.e., are they restricted to students in certain majors, or in such high demand that students outside certain majors are seldom able to enter them)? Are there courses and faculty available in the areas of study reflected in the proposed major or minor, including at least one faculty member who agrees to serve as “content expert consultant” for the program? NOTE: This faculty member should be included on the proposal cover page as one of the individuals to review the program proposal.
5. *Suitable Depth and Breadth.* In general, majors in Dietrich College must consist of at least nine 9-unit courses. (Most consist of considerably more.) Minors generally consist of at least 63 units.

In addition, majors and minors should reflect a balance of theory and application, or practice (e.g., if your interest is some variation of “verbal and visual communication,” you should include courses in visual and linguistic theory as well as “applied” courses in studio design and writing). Furthermore, course categories should be relatively “balanced” (i.e., they should include comparable unit levels). In most cases, each should contain some “required” courses (courses that *must* be taken), and other “distributional” courses (a subset of courses chosen from an approved list).

The curriculum should reflect a progression in all or most categories to advanced levels of study (e.g., 300-level courses or above).

Finally, Dietrich student-defined majors (primary or additional) must include a capstone requirement for at least 9 units (in one semester) or 18 units across two semesters. Taking the form of an original independent research or creative project, the capstone is a culmination that draws on all of the strands of the particular student-defined major program. One rule of thumb used in this regard is the expectation that at least half of the proposed program's courses (including courses at advanced levels) should be Dietrich College courses.