

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 advisor, prepare a preliminary proposal draft (following the proposal guidelines outlined in this document), 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 on-line, as to Dr. Devine, program director (jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu). Appointments with Dr. Devine may be made c/o the Dietrich College Dean's Office, either in person (Baker Hall 154) or by phone (412-268-2831).

QUESTION: When is it appropriate, or best, to begin the process of developing a Dietrich College student-defined major or minor proposal?

Typically, interested students begin to discuss and develop proposals late in the freshman year or early in the sophomore year. Initiatives that begin earlier than this often suffer from the relative lack of experience, insights and perspective that the full amount of the freshman 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 (which is generally the latest point when Dietrich College students begin course work in a major program).

Major proposals begun *after* the start of the junior year have special difficulties. Typically, juniors should be taking courses that fulfill requirements in a major. If a student who is beyond his or her sophomore year *is* pursuing a major's requirements while at the same time developing a student-defined major proposal, it is more likely that some "backtracking" will be necessary to make up requirements that are incorporated into the student-defined major. In addition, this situation sometimes results in an attempt to "re-package" as "student-defined" one or more other majors that a student has been pursuing. Sometimes such a proposal can be persuasively argued, but at least as often it cannot.

Conversely, sometimes a student beyond his or her sophomore year is *neither* in a major *nor* pursuing a major's requirements, but is instead taking courses which, it is hoped, will be part of an approved Dietrich College student-defined major program. The risks in this strategy are great because (1) it is possible that the student-defined major proposal will not be approved, or (2) it is possible that the student-defined major proposal, even if approved, may not include all of the courses that the student has taken or is currently taking.

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.

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

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 student-defined *primary* major must (either before or at the time of entry into the program) be approved for transfer into Dietrich College and, upon entry into the college, assume all general commitments of Dietrich College students (e.g., completing the college's general education requirements). When non-Dietrich College students interested in a student-defined *primary* major submit a preliminary proposal draft to the Program Director and begin discussion of the major proposal, they should also complete and submit (with all necessary attachments) an application for internal transfer into Dietrich College (obtainable in the Dietrich College Academic Advisory Center, Baker Hall A57, or from the Dietrich College web site¹). Submitting an internal transfer application does not commit a student to transferring into the college; the transfer into Dietrich College will not be executed until the student gives explicit instructions to the college to proceed with the transfer, under written and mutually-understood conditions and expectations.

Sometimes a student will propose a Dietrich College student-defined *additional* major, or minor. Both Dietrich College and non-Dietrich College students are eligible for these options, though the same processes must be followed for the major or minor proposal. Non-Dietrich College students pursuing these options, as with other additional major and minor options in Dietrich College, will be required to take only those portions of the Dietrich College a Dietrich curriculum that is prerequisites to courses in the proposed additional major or minor.

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

Candidates should expect that the process for developing a student-defined major proposal could be long and rigorous. On average, successful proposals have taken from as little as a few weeks, and as much as a full academic year. Few are approved after

¹ http://www.hss.cmu.edu/departments/deans_office/aac/advisingforms.html.

only one draft; many take a few drafts before they are fully refined and receive a final decision.

QUESTION: What if I want to begin (or if I am in the middle of) this process around registration or enrollment days? Will the student-defined major Program Director be able to see me and agree on a set of courses for me to take 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 must follow the curriculum requirements of your current college and major. The Dietrich College Student-Defined program will generally not authorize schedules of courses for students not yet accepted into the program.