

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What do I do if I haven't declared a major yet and am waiting to hear if my Independent Interdisciplinary Major is approved?**

All students are required to declare a major by the end of sophomore year. Even if you plan to propose an Independent Interdisciplinary Major or are waiting to learn if your Independent Interdisciplinary Major is approved you must go ahead and declare a standard major. This can always be dropped at a later point. Students must have a realistic back up major in case the IIM is not approved.

## **How many courses should I select?**

Most Independent Interdisciplinary Majors consist of 12 courses (eleven courses and one independent study, IIM 98a/b, or ten courses and the two-semester IIM 99d, senior thesis courses). It is not to your advantage to list more than 15 courses in sections I and II of the Proposed Curriculum for Independent Interdisciplinary Major petition.

## **Can course credit earned from study abroad, summer school, cross-registration, or domestic leave of absence count toward my Independent Interdisciplinary Major?**

Yes, but at least 8 of the courses must be taken at Brandeis or through cross-registration.

## **Can "pass/fail" courses count toward an Independent Interdisciplinary Major?**

As is true with any other major at the university, courses with a grade of "pass" cannot count toward completion of an IIM.

## **Can language courses count toward my Independent Interdisciplinary Major?**

Language courses numbered 40 and above may count toward an Independent Interdisciplinary Major, but those numbered below 40 cannot.

## **What are some of the pitfalls to avoid in selecting courses?**

Do select courses from three or more departments. Do not avoid the "hard" parts of a departmental major (i.e., Statistics, Organic Chemistry). Try to find a mix of introductory and intermediate or advanced courses. All selected courses should relate in a relatively obvious way to your topic, or you should explain the connection in your proposal. If you are able to review the curricula of similar majors offered at other colleges and universities, you will most likely find appropriate course topics to include. You must also be able to complete all selected courses in your time remaining at Brandeis.

## **How many courses may double count with another major and/or minor?**

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of designing an IIM, no more than four courses may double count toward another major or two courses towards another minor. No more than six courses may be used toward any additional major(s) or minor(s).

## **What exactly does the senior research or independent study component entail?**

Students who wish to write a senior thesis for their Independent Interdisciplinary Majors enroll in IIM 99d, a two semester course in which a senior honors project or thesis is produced. An independent study, IIM 98, is a one-semester course taken in either semester of the senior year. For either a 98 or a 99, you must identify a faculty sponsor who will supervise your work and assign the course grade. The academic requirements of an independent study usually include writing a paper and reading a selected set of books or other research documents. Review the guidelines on the back of the Independent Study "add -form," available in the Office of the University Registrar, for more information. Students can only enroll in a 99 or 98 course by submitting a completed form in person to the Office of the University Registrar. Neither course can be registered for on the web.

## **How do I choose a good title for my Independent Interdisciplinary Major?**

The title should resemble those used for similar majors at other institutions. Because your title will be listed on your transcript, it should not be too specific (e.g. "Environmental Studies" is fine, but "Global Warming in the Developing World" is not). It will also be stated on your diploma at the time of graduation.

## **When is my proposal due?**

Petitions are due either in mid-October or in early March. Check with the Office of Academic Services or the website for exact dates. Please note an Independent Interdisciplinary Major must be declared before the end of your junior year.

**Who will review the petition?**

A subcommittee representing the four schools of the University (Creative Arts, Humanities, Science, and Social Science) and including two faculty members from the Committee on Academic Standing and two from the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee will meet once each semester to review your petition. You are welcome to meet with the committee. Meetings usually last about twenty minutes, and include a brief presentation by you, followed by questions from the committee.

**What do I do after my proposal has been approved?**

There is no need to complete a major declaration form for your approved IIM. The Office of Academic Services will be sure that your IIM is added to your academic record. However, be sure to meet with your primary advisor at least once per semester to review your progress. You should also provide regular updates to the other members of your committee, and meet with them as needed.

**What happens if a course I planned to take is no longer available?**

You may revise the requirements of your major with the approval of your primary advisor. When you make a revision to your major, your primary advisor should e-mail the IIM coordinator with the planned changes. The updated information will be put in your file.

**What do I do if my primary advisor leaves the University for a semester before I graduate?**

Ask your primary advisor to approve a temporary or permanent replacement to serve in his or her place while he or she is away. You must maintain a permanent committee of three faculty advisors throughout your Independent Interdisciplinary Major studies at Brandeis.

**Can I graduate with honors in my Independent Interdisciplinary Major?**

Independent majors should achieve a 3.25 cumulative grade point average in order to be considered for "departmental" honors. You must also complete the IIM 99d option, a senior honors project in your Independent Interdisciplinary Major. Students enroll in IIM 99d for two semesters and receive the equivalent of eight credit hours (out of 128) or two courses (out of 32). After your thesis advisor and other readers have read your thesis, they will recommend whether your work merits one of the three degrees of honors to your permanent committee of three faculty advisors.

**How does the University know if I have completed my requirements?**

Towards the end of senior year, your primary faculty advisor will review your Independent Interdisciplinary Major declaration form (including documented changes) and ascertain whether you have met all requirements.

**In which mini-commencement will I participate?**

The Office of the University Registrar will contact you before graduation and ask you to select the mini commencement ceremony you wish to attend. Most students select the department of their primary advisor or the one in which they took the most courses.

**Can I propose an IIM as a senior?**

Normally, students must have their IIM proposals approved before the end of their junior year. However, in some rare cases, proposals from seniors have been reviewed as long as the student will complete another regular major before he or she graduates. **Important note:** it is more difficult for seniors to gain approval because they typically do not have enough time to incorporate curricular changes suggested by either the UCC or by their own faculty committee.

**Is there an Undergraduate Departmental Representative for Independent Interdisciplinary Majors?**

Yes. The name and contact information of the UDR for Independent Interdisciplinary Majors is [available here](#). The IIM UDR(s) look forward to answering any questions you might have about the process.