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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

An independent interdisciplinary major (IIM) offers students with diverse academic interests the opportunity to design their own course of study. Each IIM is designed around a topic, theme, issue or set of questions that cannot be adequately addressed within the context of existing majors or minors. Students pursuing an IIM take courses from different disciplines, work one-on-one in sustained dialogue with faculty members and complete an independent senior research project. A few majors and minors that are now part of the regular university curriculum began as IIM topics.

### What makes the program distinctive?

Students interested in creating an IIM can choose from more than 1,000 courses from 43 departments and programs. Our student-focused learning environment provides meaningful interactions between students and professors, making Brandeis an ideal setting for pursuing an inde-

pendent major. IIMs at Brandeis are designed by students in collaboration with three faculty members from at least two departments. Further options in experiential learning, internships and student leadership at Brandeis add to the IIM experience.

## FAST FACTS

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**Courses required for the IIM:** 12

**Students pursuing an IIM in the past three years:** 20+

**Popular IIM topics:** “Communication and Media Studies,” “Urban Studies” and “Cognitive Science”

**Website:** [brandeis.edu/acserv/advising/sophomores/iim/index.html](http://brandeis.edu/acserv/advising/sophomores/iim/index.html)

**RECENT IIMS**

**Cognitive Science**

Nathan H. '11 created his IIM about the connection between the brain and the mind and how these things can be explained in terms of computer systems. His courses combined neuroscience, philosophy and computer science, and he focused on artificial intelligence, neural modeling and the philosophy of mind.

**Visual Culture**

Thomas A. '09, who had always been interested in film, television, fashion, art and advertising, created his IIM after taking an anthropology course focused on sociocultural theories related to the study of visual images and a costume-design course that allowed him to appreciate the aesthetics of theater productions. "Visual Culture" combined courses in anthropology, art history, theater arts and English.

**Forensic Psychology**

Dana O. '10 wanted to combine her interests in psychology, sociology and law. Her IIM explored the criminal justice system through each of these disciplines. In addition, her internship with the Latinas Know Your Rights Project, a branch of Greater Boston Legal Services, helped Dana apply her knowledge in a real-world setting.

**OTHER IIMS**

Recent independent interdisciplinary majors include "Conflict and Cooperation Studies," "Anthropology and Environment," "Gender and Sexuality Studies," "Urban Education" and "Theater for Social Change."

**THE IIM EXPERIENCE**

**IIM requirements**

Students with a proven record of academic achievement, seriousness of purpose and intellectual curiosity design their IIMs in collaboration with at least three faculty members. They have until the end of their junior year to receive approval to create the IIM. Each IIM comprises 12 courses, including a senior capstone project to develop an independent paper or research.

**Advising**

The IIM coordinator in the Office of Academic Services advises students about how to begin the IIM process. In addition, two undergraduate departmental representatives who are pursuing their own

independent majors are available to answer questions from students considering this program. Throughout the process, three or more faculty advisers help guide the student's progress toward designing and completing the major.

**Other academic programs**

IIM students are able to pursue an additional major or minor outside of their independent major, and they can graduate with departmental honors. They can study abroad and transfer a full semester's worth of credit toward their IIM, and they can study a foreign language throughout their time at Brandeis. IIM students are also welcome to follow the prehealth track or engage in prelaw advising.

**BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

**Hands-on health care experience**

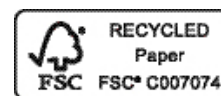
Ana Maya K. '11 titled her IIM "Medical Anthropology," as it examines the intersection of medicine and culture. Outside of her IIM, she has taught children's yoga at the Lemberg Children's Center, worked at a California center that offers free health care to low-income women with cancer, acted as a co-coordinator of a health literacy project at a community health center and worked as a patient liaison for deaf and hard-of-hearing children at the Boston Children's Hospital in Waltham, Mass.

**Social justice in action**

Marla M. '12 worked as a summer intern at Facing History and Ourselves, an educational organization devoted to helping classrooms and communities link history with moral choices of today. The following fall, Marla took the "Social Justice and Social Policy" internship course, and in her final paper she explored why people become impassioned about communities that do not directly connect to their personal identity. Understanding how people connect to others different from themselves has informed Marla's IIM, titled "Conflict and Cooperation Studies."

*"IIMs offer a unique opportunity to make your college education truly your own. They demonstrate active education at its finest: encouraging each student to reflect on his or her major, how it is defined, how it defines itself, and how he or she hopes to integrate it into his or her future. I couldn't be more grateful for the incredibly supportive faculty and advisory staff at Brandeis for helping me through my own IIM process."*

Ana Maya K. '11, "Medical Anthropology"



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