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## Recommendations for Majors

In March, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) appointed a subcommittee (George Hall, Tim Hickey, Anum Irfan Khan '10, Eileen McNamara, Jim Mandrell, and Elaine Wong) to review the range of requirements and general curricular guidelines for Majors in the departments and programs of the School of Arts and Sciences.

Subcommittee members first reviewed suggestions regarding streamlining and integration of curricular programs submitted by departments and school councils to the Curriculum and Academic Restructuring Steering Committee. Brandeis currently provides no guidelines regarding the structure or construction of a major, other than requiring that the majority of courses counting for a major be taken at the university. The recommendations/suggestions that follow are made with an eye toward maximizing flexibility for students without compromising academic rigor. The UCC encourages all departments and programs offering majors to:

### ***1. Review the total number of courses required for the major.***

As Brandeis completes its transformation to a smaller faculty size, we will gradually lose about 10% of our faculty, thereby needing to offer 10% fewer courses. It makes sense to ease that transition by taking the time now to reexamine requirements and determine whether we can decrease the number of required courses without diminishing the value of the degree for our students. Some programs may find that they have developed degree requirements with the assumption that the students majoring or minoring will be continuing on to a PhD program in their field. Students who are not planning on pursuing an academic career might however be better served by a revised curriculum. Those students planning on academic careers can still be advised to take additional courses or a narrow set of electives. To help guide this process, we describe below an approach to reexamining the degree requirements for a major, minor, or MA program with the goal of improving the quality of the program for all students. This is essentially the process that Computer Science has been taking over the past year, resulting in a new BA with 9 courses rather than 14 (12 with 2 labs).

***Gather Data.*** To make a principled change in the requirements it is helpful to know your students' career paths as well as their other majors and minors.

### ***Determine conceptual degree requirements for different types of programs.***

The Provost's Assessment Committee is developing best practices for thinking about what knowledge, skills, and experience we want our majors and minors to obtain at Brandeis, and developing tools for assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum. This assessment-based analysis can be used to guide our modifications of degree requirements.

***Start with a blank slate and redesign the curriculum.*** We can take this opportunity to rework the curricula of our programs from the ground up and generate pathways through the majors and minors for each of the different kinds of students identified earlier. The degree requirements should be formulated in a way to allow for all of these different

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paths, e.g., the academic track, the pre-law track, the entrepreneurial track, the track for students also majoring in the Arts, etc. We can then rely on strong advising to help students find the path through the major that best suits their career goals and aspirations.

***Consider whether or not co- and pre-requisites for courses required for the major and minor create obstacles for interested students.*** Although it is possible that these prerequisites are indeed essential—e.g., for majors and minors in languages other than English, where basic facility in the language of instruction cannot be presumed—it is also possible that departments and programs may want to consider a more flexible system of co- and pre-requisites that will enable students more easily to fulfill the requirements for their major and minor.

***2. Consider expanding the number of cross-listed courses with more than one abbreviation.***

The Office of the Registrar should be urged to allow the use of dual and even triple department and/or program abbreviations for specific courses for purposes of registration and the transcript. This would make it both easier and more desirable for departments and programs to share courses and students, since it would allow students to be counted in a “shared” course according to where it might count toward a major or minor.

To give one example, Women’s and Gender Studies is sponsoring a team-taught course next year that will be offered under the American Studies abbreviation. The course can count toward the major and minor in WGS, but it would be clearer from the outset, and make sense for departments and programs where enrollments are critical, if it were possible to use both the AMST and WMGS abbreviations.

***3. Consider allowing students to fulfill a major requirement by taking a cross-listed course or by petitioning the UAH for approval of any course they can justify.***

Some departments currently limit the number of courses from “outside” the department that students may use to fulfill requirements for majors and minors. These departments may wish to reconsider this policy and make greater use of cross-listed courses to enrich their curricula. For example, until this year Anthropology had not accepted courses from other departments for cross-listing within anthropology. The department has recently changed its policy and now accepts courses in archeology offered by another department (Classics). Anthropology now plans to review the Bulletin and obtain permission from other instructors to cross-list their courses. These valuable additions will enable the department to maintain a rich array of courses in the future, with the same size or smaller size faculty. Searching for possible cross-listed courses may also lead to reductions in course duplication and redundancy across departments.

All programs may also wish to inform students about procedures to fulfill requirements by petitioning the UAH or curriculum committee to approve/substitute a course from another department or program. These additional courses might be excellent candidates for future cross-listing. The petitioning process also requires students to provide a

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rationale for their course selection, and may expand the curriculum while still maintaining the program's high standards.

***4. Examine whether 90-level courses may count toward the major.***

A number of opportunities currently exist to allow students to complete internships, reading courses, and independent studies as well as peer internships within the framework of different departments and programs. These courses are commonly given a number in the 90s.

Given the expanding emphasis on experiential learning, departments and programs may want to revisit their guidelines for and expectations of these courses with an eye toward counting them toward the major and minor. Depending on how an internship or independent study is framed, expectations could include, for example, internship research and writing that would benefit both communities of which the student is part—the agency and the university—and tie in to more traditional academic means of fulfilling department and program requirements.

Some departments, such as Philosophy, explicitly state how many 90 level courses may count toward requirements for the major. Other departments, such as Computer Science, already count 90 level courses toward major requirements, without stating limits in the *Bulletin*.

***5. Examine whether existing courses numbered in the 1-99 or 200+ range can be numbered in the 100 range so that both undergrads and graduate students can easily enroll.***

In many departments advanced undergraduate students are regularly allowed into graduate courses numbered in the 200s. Renumbering 200-level courses that in fact serve both constituencies may encourage more undergraduates to consider enrolling. Further, departments without graduate programs may, upon reflection, recognize that some of their undergraduate offerings currently numbered below 100 have much to offer to graduate students in related fields. Allowing graduate students into such courses may be mutually beneficial to both sets of students.

Creative examples of dual-purpose courses include Anthropology 144a, and Physics 39a and 169b. ANTH 144a, The Anthropology of Gender, has two sections: one for undergraduates and the other for graduate students, with the graduate student section meeting for an additional 4<sup>th</sup> hour of class every other week. Physics 39a/169b, a lab course with no lectures, works well with both undergrads and grads. Students break up into teams of two or three with each team performing a different experiment for four weeks, and then new teams are formed. Students do three experiments a semester. Usually graduate students and undergrads are segregated; and thus it is easy to expect more from graduate students than from undergraduates

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***6. Consider replacing formal tracks within majors with suggested pathways for study, to be determined by a student's post-graduate goals (i.e., employment, graduate school).***

The reliance on more informal pathways could streamline requirements for the major and strengthen ties among students and instructors by reducing the isolation that can sometimes result from rigid adherence to formal tracks. The success of such a change would depend on earlier, attentive advising.

Examples of departments and programs that are now considering this approach include Music, and International and Global Studies. Several years ago, the Philosophy department decided to offer only one minor, eliminating three other tracks in Language, Logic and the Philosophy of Science; Value Theory: Ethics, Politics, Society, Religion, and Art; and Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind, with no ill effect.