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 over 50 departments and programs. Our student-focused learning environment provides meaningful interactions between students and professors, making Brandeis an ideal setting for pursuing an independent 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

Courses required for the IIM: 12

Students pursuing an IIM in the past three years: 30+

Popular IIM topics: “Communication and Media Studies,” “Urban Studies” and “Religious Studies”

Website: brandeis.edu/acserv/advising/sophomores/iim/index.html
RECENT IIMs

Urban Studies
Josh B. ’15 sought to examine the history and growth of the American city and ways to address contemporary urban challenges. His studies included courses in politics, anthropology, environmental studies and American studies.

Cognitive Science
Alicia P. ’15 was fascinated with the study of neuroeconomics. Drawing from economics, psychology, computer science, neuroscience and philosophy, she sought to gain an understanding of behavior in the brain and how it affects economic decision making. She was able to further her study by conducting research in a social psychology lab at Harvard Business School.

Theater for Social Change
Gabriella F. ’14 wanted to explore how theater and the performing arts can be utilized within communities to explore issues, generate dialogue and promote authentic change. Her studies incorporated courses in theater arts, sociology, legal studies and politics. She applied her knowledge in an internship that allowed her to help local high school students create original works of theater.

Other IIMs
Recent independent interdisciplinary majors include “Communications and Media Studies,” “Public Policy,” “Peace and Justice Studies,” “Religious Studies,” “Sustainable Development” and “Architectural Studies.”

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, 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 environmental justice experience
Sam P. ’14 is working on an IIM called “Sustainable Development,” which investigates how we can continue to improve our well-being without harming the well-being of future generations. Outside his IIM, Sam has worked at the WATCH Housing Advocacy Clinic to help Waltham residents who need housing and social assistance; conducted water-quality monitoring as an intern at the Cape Cod National Seashore; and participated in a Justice Brandeis Semester in which students studied toxic exposure issues in nail salons in Boston and the social and environmental justice issues associated with them.

Social justice in action
Rebecca L. ’16 is working on an IIM in “Applied Math and Data Science” that explores how we can use data to inform future decisions that better our world. She gained hands-on experience as a data intern for Popular Science magazine, where she helped to render trends creatively through data visualization. She works as a layout editor for the Justice, Brandeis’ student newspaper, and as a part-time data analyst for Brandeis International Business School.

“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”