

# Independent Interdisciplinary Major Proposal Instructions

Brandeis University - Office of Academic Services

An [Independent Interdisciplinary Major \(IIM\)](#) offers students with diverse academic interests the opportunity to design a course of study that allows for truly original and interdisciplinary inquiry. Our student-focused learning environment provides meaningful interactions between students and professors, making Brandeis an ideal setting for pursuing an independent major.

To pursue an IIM, you'll propose a course of study, drawing on at least three departments, that will enable you to probe your topic through a variety of lenses, perspectives, and schools of thought. Once your proposal is accepted, you'll work closely with three carefully chosen faculty advisors as you complete the 12 courses required for your IIM. Your IIM experience will culminate in a senior capstone project.

Students should be in close contact with the IIM Coordinator and their faculty advisors as they prepare to submit their IIM proposal application. This set of instructions is intended to offer supplemental guidance only.

## General Timeline for Proposing an IIM

- IIM proposal applications are accepted twice a year:
  - Fall semester – October
  - Spring semester – March

Check the [IIM website](#) for exact dates. You should plan to complete your application about a month prior to submission to allow time for your faculty advisors to write you a letter of endorsement.

- Students typically begin preparing their IIM materials at least one semester before submitting their proposal application. This allows for a truly collaborative effort between the student and their faculty advisors, which tends to lead to stronger student-faculty relationships and sufficient time to develop a viable proposal.
- The most common time to submit an IIM proposal is the spring semester of your sophomore year.
- You should plan to submit your proposal applications no later than the fall of your junior year. The IIM review committee will consider proposal applications from juniors in their second semester only with prior approval from the IIM Coordinator.

# Overview of the IIM Proposal and Review Process

## *Getting Started*

1. Print and read the [IIM Checklist](#).
2. Review our list of [frequently asked questions](#).
3. Schedule an appointment with Katy Colahan, IIM Coordinator, using our [online booking system](#) or by calling the Academic Services front desk at (781) 736-3470. Katy can help guide you through the IIM proposal process from start to finish.
4. Approach faculty members about possibly serving as one of your three IIM advisors. You should share a copy of the [Memo to Faculty Advisors](#) (pdf) with your faculty advisors, which explains the program and the faculty member's responsibilities as an advisor.

## *Submitting a Proposal*

Completed proposals include:

- an [IIM Proposal Application](#),
- a written statement,
- a signed letter of support from your faculty advisors, and
- a copy of 3-4 comparable program descriptions from other colleges/universities.

Proposals should be submitted to the IIM Coordinator in Academic Services by 5:00 pm on the submission deadline.

## *Review Process*

The IIM subcommittee meets once a semester to review students' proposals and make final approvals. The IIM subcommittee is made up of four faculty members, one from each of the four schools (Science, Humanities, Social Science, and Creative Arts), the Senior Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences for Undergraduate Education, and the IIM Coordinator in the Office of Academic Services. At least two of the four faculty members will have previously served as advisors for IIM proposals. The sub-committee pays careful attention to the interdisciplinary and liberal arts context of the IIM, the coherence of the set of classes, and how the IIM fits into the student's overall academic plan.

## Overview of IIM Proposal Application Sections

To get the most out of this overview, please review it alongside the [IIM Proposal Application](#).

## Section I: Basic Information

This section asks you to provide:

- your contact information,
- your intended major plans, and
  - The title of your proposed Independent Interdisciplinary Major (IIM)
  - Any other majors or minors you plan to pursue if your IIM proposal is approved
  - The majors or minors you will pursue if your IIM proposal is not approved
- the names and contact information for your faculty advisors.
  - Faculty advisors should be full-time professors at Brandeis.
  - Your primary faculty advisor should be a professor from the School of Arts and Sciences.
  - You may have one secondary faculty advisor from a graduate school of Brandeis (e.g. the Heller School for Social Policy and Management or Brandeis International Business School).
  - **Please note:** Any exceptions to the above guidelines need to be approved in advance by the IIM Coordinator.

## Section II: Proposed Curriculum

In this section, you should include all 12 courses that make up the curriculum for your proposed major. When building your curriculum you want to be sure that you are selecting courses that provide both breadth and depth to your learning. To get a sense of how undergraduate majors are intended to expose students to the breadth of a field and allow for in-depth exploration, you can look at major requirements within the [University Bulletin](#). Notice how most majors require students to take courses from a number of defined subfields. Once a broad understanding of the field has been established, students are encouraged to take advanced courses on more narrowly defined topics to gain experience exploring academic topics in depth.

Section II has four sub-categories: Brandeis Courses, Optional Non-Brandeis Courses, Senior Capstone Project, and Alternate Courses. Three out of four of these sections will ask you to provide the following information:

- Course Number
- Course Title
- Foundational Literacy (WI, OC, DL)
  - You should identify the three distinct courses that fulfill the required [foundational literacy categories](#) within your IIM:
    - Writing Intensive (WI)
    - Oral Communication (OC)
    - Digital Literacy (DL)
- Semester Completed/Scheduled
- Grade Earned
  - For courses you have already completed.

### *Brandeis Courses*

Here, you should list the bulk of the courses you intend to take for your IIM curriculum. The courses listed here should all be courses offered at Brandeis. For courses you have not yet taken, you should list the semester you intend to take the course. If you do not know when a course that is central to

your IIM will next be offered, you should connect with the department coordinator or academic administrator of the appropriate Brandeis department.

### *Optional Non-Brandeis Courses*

This is the place to list any non-Brandeis courses you would like to count toward your IIM. These may include courses from studying abroad, approved non-Brandeis summer school courses, or other transfer courses. You can apply a maximum of four non-Brandeis courses toward your IIM, with occasional exceptions for foreign language majors (e.g., Italian studies).

### *Senior Capstone Project*

Your capstone project is an opportunity to delve deeply into a particular area of interest and draw from the knowledge and skills that you have developed by way of your carefully designed IIM curriculum.

For the culminating experience of your IIM, you will work on either a one-semester independent study (IIM 98) or a two-semester senior thesis (IIM 99d).

**Please note:** if you are interested in pursuing major honors for the IIM, a cumulative GPA of 3.25 and a senior thesis are required.

### *Alternate Courses*

Occasionally, you might find that a course you had intended to take is not offered as expected or conflicts with another course, and you need to replace it with something else. This is the place to list courses that might be suitable alternatives.

## **Section III: Written Statement**

This section should be three to four typed pages and follow the formatting guidelines below:

- Font – 12 pt. Times New Roman or Calibri
- Spacing – Double-spaced
- Header – Right justified (Last Name, First Name – [IIM Title])
- Section titles – See section headers below.

Your proposal should cover the following topics to allow the review committee to understand the rationale for your Independent Interdisciplinary Major:

### 1. Major Description

- An overview of your intended field of study that is approximately 150 to 300 words.
- This description will be shared with the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee and should concisely describe your field of study so that it is intelligible to both those familiar with the field and those unfamiliar with the field.

### 2. Why an IIM?

- Here you have the opportunity to explain why you are proposing an IIM and explain how your IIM is preferable to a combination of existing majors/minors.

### 3. Curriculum Overview

- Comparable programs
  - This is where you will describe how the curriculum of 3-4 comparable undergraduate majors at other schools informed the development of your IIM curriculum. Strong written proposals will include a comparison of the structure and content of your IIM to that of programs at other schools. When reviewing comparable programs here are some things to consider:
    - Is the major offered elsewhere?
    - What is the structure of the major?
    - What are the core and/or main courses of the major? Are these courses like any courses you could take at Brandeis?
    - Are there elements from the major you like and plan to use in your IIM? If so, what are they?
    - Are there elements from the major that you did not find to be useful for your IIM? What are they? Why would they not be helpful for your IIM?
- Intended Curriculum
  - You will discuss the curriculum for your IIM and how the courses contribute to your course of study. Here are some guiding questions to consider:
    - How did you choose to structure the courses for your major and why?
    - Did you choose to break your courses into subcategories? If so, please make sure to describe these categories, and explain how they will contribute to you developing breadth and depth of understanding in your intended major.
    - How does each course contribute to the curriculum of your IIM so that it contributes to your stated intellectual goals?
- **Please note:** You can choose to merge the discussion of comparable programs and your intended courses in whatever way will best allow you to describe the rationale for the structure and content of your IIM's curriculum. You are welcome to request examples of previously approved IIMs to get a sense of the range of ways students have approached this component of the written proposal in the past.

### 4. Personal Relevance

- What are your intellectual goals and post-Brandeis plans and how does your IIM contribute to them?

## Section IV: Other Attachments

For this section, you will prepare and upload two attachments:

### 1. Faculty Letter of Endorsement

- One required component of an Independent Interdisciplinary Major proposal is a letter of support signed by the three faculty advisors, typically authored by the primary advisor. This can be a signed paper letter or an electronic letter with electronic signatures of all three advisors.
- Once your proposal is finalized and has been reviewed by each of your faculty advisors, you will ask your primary advisor to write a letter discussing the committee's endorsement of your proposal and addressing all of the bulleted points in the [Memorandum to Advisors of IIMs](#).
- **Please note:** It is your responsibility as the applicant to give your primary faculty advisor enough time to write a letter and to collect the signatures of your secondary advisors. You should give your faculty advisors at least two weeks to write your letter, and you should allow an additional week for gathering signatures.

### 2. Comparable Major Curriculum Descriptions

- You will provide PDF copies the descriptions and curriculums of 3-4 majors comparable to the IIM topic you are proposing. You can print to PDF directly from the program websites.

## Proposal submission

You will submit your completed IIM proposal to the IIM Coordinator by 5:00 pm on the day of the submission deadline. A completed proposal must include a:

- [IIM Proposal Application](#),
- written statement,
- signed letter of support from your faculty advisors, and
- copies of 3-4 comparable program descriptions from other colleges/universities.

Please submit this as one PDF with the four components included in the order listed above.

Questions? Please contact the IIM Coordinator, Katy Colahan at [kcolahan@brandeis.edu](mailto:kcolahan@brandeis.edu), or a current IIM Undergraduate Departmental Representative.