



# Brandeis University

## Memorandum to Advisors of IIMs

To: Advisors of prospective Independent Interdisciplinary Majors  
From: The Office of Academic Services  
Subject: The Role of Advisors of Independent Interdisciplinary Majors

You have been asked to serve as an advisor for a student's Independent Interdisciplinary Major (IIM). 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. A proven record of academic achievement, seriousness of purpose, and intellectual curiosity are prerequisites for this endeavor.

Students proposing an IIM are required to find **one primary faculty advisor** and **two secondary faculty advisors**. Secondary advisors assist the student with the proposal process, offering suggestions and edits to the IIM curriculum, and evaluating the viability of the student's proposed course of study. The primary advisor also assists the student with the proposal process, as well as meets periodically (at least once a semester) with the student to review progress toward completion of courses constituting the major. This review is necessary because irregularly scheduled courses can impede a student's graduation plans. Changes in a program must be approved by the primary advisor and copied in an email to the IIM coordinator.

Faculty advisors are expected to serve as a resource to the student *throughout his or her studies at Brandeis*. For students pursuing Independent Interdisciplinary Major honors, it is the committee of three advisors that will decide on the level of honors to be awarded.

One required component of an Independent Interdisciplinary Major petition is a letter of support signed by the three faculty advisors, and usually authored by the primary advisor. In assessing this project, please review the student's transcript and proposal, and then evaluate and include in the letter a discussion of:

- The topic's viability as a discrete area of intellectual inquiry. (Are similar undergraduate majors offered at other colleges and universities? Is the proposed major more desirable than a combination of majors and/or minors already offered at Brandeis?)
- The balance of courses (at least two, but preferably three or more departments).
- The appropriateness, breadth, and depth of the proposed curriculum
- The interrelationship of the courses.
- The candidate's qualifications to undertake this project. While there are no absolute criteria for judging a student's qualifications, you should examine the student's transcript for evidence of academic achievement, and/or try to determine the student's ability to work well independently.
- The title of the major. Ideally, a title should resemble that of other majors, e.g. Environmental Studies or East Asian Studies, and not be too specific, e.g., not "The Chinese Bureaucracy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," or "Global Warming in the Developing World."
- Any other factors you think would be helpful to the Committee as it reviews the petition.

Please contact the IIM coordinator, Katy McLaughlin, in the Office of Academic Services if you have any questions at (781) 736-3455 or [kmclau@brandeis.edu](mailto:kmclau@brandeis.edu).