

A GUIDE FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES MAJORS

If you are thinking about completing an M.A. or an M.S. under the title of *Interdisciplinary Studies*, there are a number of important points to consider. First, is this the only degree which will satisfy your needs? For a few, truly, this is the only way to complete a Masters degree in the areas of interest. But for many others, a degree in a major field that offers elective options will probably work better. We urge you to investigate all possibilities and talk to advisors in a number of departments before seeking a major in Interdisciplinary Studies.

Second, will this major serve you best when you are job hunting? Certain employers, not understanding what you have done, may simply disregard your application because you do not have a standard degree. The Community College systems, for example, have instituted a hiring clause which states that a teacher in that system *must* have an M.A. or M.S. in the field in which the person is teaching. In most cases, then, this major will not work. Third, are you self-directed and self-motivated enough to pursue a degree without the usual lists of requirements and departmental deadlines to guide you? In this major, you will select a committee to guide you and to support you in choosing classes, and to serve as a thesis committee, but most often the faculty member you choose as chair of your committee will not be the graduate advisor of a department and thus will rely on you to know what must be done and when tasks must be completed. Again, since you must work with faculty from at least two different departments, often those committee members will not even know each other as you start your work. Thus, you will need to keep your committee aware of graduate office deadlines, and you will need to get your committee together to meet each other, to talk about your program, and to decide what form your comprehensive exam will take at the end of the program.

If knowing all of this, you are still certain this is the right degree for you; the following information may answer some of the questions you have, and may guide through the steps of gaining your degree.

1. Requirements

Read the program application carefully; it will help mold the idea of your degree by indicating the limits in your choice of courses and in asking you to determine, in the beginning, what kind of thesis or project you will be doing. If you have any questions, please contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. If your plans are clear and meet the requirements for the major, the Associate Dean will sign the Interdisciplinary Studies proposal form, giving you initial approval to proceed with your application. Remember that you must still apply for admission to the degree program.

2. Classifiability

Remember that in order to graduate you must attain full classified standing. As an Interdisciplinary Studies major, you must prove that you are classifiable in a M.A. or M.S. degree program offered by one of the majors in which you will be working.

Request that the graduate advisor in one of the departments in which you will work send a memo to the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, stating that if you were an applicant for a master's degree in that department you would be classifiable. You do not need to seek actual classified standing in a department; once the memo is received, you can apply for classified standing as an Interdisciplinary Studies major. Until then you will be conditionally classified in this major.

3. Selection of a Committee

You will need to select a committee of three persons who will act as advisors for this major and will operate as your thesis committee. If you have received an undergraduate degree from SJSU, you may already know three professors with whom you want to work on your degree. If not, you will probably need to take a semester to get to know the faculty so that you can choose your committee. Remember that SJSU faculty get no extra time or pay to work with you on this degree; those who agree will do so because they are interested in your goals and your thesis topic. Be as specific as possible about what you want to accomplish, while letting them know you value their advice and direction. When you meet with potential or actual advisors, be prepared and have materials well organized for them. If they have questions about the major itself, ask them to contact the Office of Graduate Studies and Research.

Your committee should be composed of at least three full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty at SJSU. In some cases, temporary faculty members, faculty from another university, or experts in your field of study may function as committee members, with the approval of the Office of Graduate Studies and Research. Note that, at a minimum, two of the three persons serving on the thesis committee must be SJSU faculty. In addition, the committee Chair must be a full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty member at SJSU.

4. Graduate Writing Requirement

All graduate students must meet the graduate writing requirement, which can be accomplished in a number of ways. First, if you graduated with an undergraduate degree from SJSU or any other CSU campus, you have already met the requirement by taking a Junior-level test or course. If you have not done this, you may elect to take the WST to qualify for a departmental 100W writing course. If you waive the course by virtue of the WST test, you have met the requirement; otherwise you should take the course. Note that the 100W course will not count as unit credit in your graduate degree program. Alternatively, if one of your departments offers a graduate course meeting this requirement, you may take that approved course. A list of approved graduate courses for use in meeting the graduate writing requirement can be found at Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations website: www.sjsu.edu/gape. Finally, if you have a publication for which you are the sole author, this may be used to meet the requirement, pending approval from the Associate Dean.

5. Advancement to Candidacy

The semester before you plan to graduate, you must submit an Approval of Candidacy form to Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations; the form can be found online at www.sjsu.edu/gape. Complete the form, and have your thesis committee chair person sign the form before you return it to Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations. The courses listed on this form are those for which you will be held responsible during the graduation check. If courses differ from those on your Interdisciplinary Studies proposal, please obtain a memo from your thesis chair indicating a reason for the change(s); submit the memo to the Associate Dean for approval and inclusion in your file. **NOTE: CHANGES TO YOUR DEGREE PROGRAM NEED TO BE APPROVED BY THE ASSOCIATE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH.**

6. Thesis Requirement: Plan A or Plan C

All Interdisciplinary Studies majors must do a thesis (Plan A) or a special project (Plan C). In order to complete this requirement, you will sign up for 3-6 units of 299 (not 298) from one of the departments in which you are working. The committee members who chose to work with you on the program also serve as the thesis committee. Be sure to follow a specific style guide (Turabian, APA, MLA, etc.) just as you would for a thesis within a major department. In addition, access the Thesis Guidelines from the Office of Graduate Studies and Research website (www.sjsu.edu/gradstudies) as soon as possible. Theses and Creative Projects must comply with the thesis guidelines for approval.

7. Comprehensive Examination or Verification of Culminating Experience

All Interdisciplinary Studies majors must meet this requirement; the way in which the requirement is met is determined by the thesis committee. Often it takes the form of a defense of the thesis in which the candidate is questioned by his/her committee members and other interested parties about the goals, the process, and the results of the thesis project. Your thesis committee chair must report by memo to Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations that this requirement has been met. A verification of culminating experience form is available online at www.sjsu.edu/gape.

8. Applying for Graduation

Submit an application for graduation by the deadline to Graduate Admissions and Program Evaluations (the form is available online: www.sjsu.edu/gape). You cannot graduate if you do not apply for graduation. Your records will be checked to see that you have completed or are completing the requirements your committee and our office has set for you. You will be notified of your status once that check has been completed.

San Jose State University Proposal for Interdisciplinary Studies Major

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ SJSU ID #: _____
(provided after you apply for admission)

Email: _____

Initial Approval: Graduate Studies: _____
Associate Dean _____ Date _____

1. Title of Interdisciplinary Degree (as it is to appear on your degree)

2. Discuss why you need a special major. Why can't your needs satisfied by an existing major?

3. Name of Department in which you have or could achieve classified standing:

(*See item 2 in the guidelines)

4. Name of your major advisor and his/her department. (This is the person with whom you will be working most closely in implementing your program)

Advisor Name

Department

Advisor Signature

