

# SPECIAL DIVISIONAL MAJORS

**Director of undergraduate studies:** Sarah Mahurin (sarah.mahurin@yale.edu), Dean's Office TD, 432-0754

A Special Divisional Major affords an alternative for students whose academic interests cannot be met by an existing departmental or special major. Students may, with the approval of the Committee on Honors and Academic Standing, design majors of their own in consultation with members of the faculty and in accordance with the procedures outlined below.

Special Divisional Majors differ so widely in content that there is no uniform format, but many of these majors draw from several departments to focus on a particular culture, period, or problem (e.g., French studies, medieval studies, urban studies). Students interested in pursuing a Special Divisional Major in Renaissance studies should visit the Renaissance Studies program website. A Special Divisional Major may not be offered as one of two majors.

Students considering a Special Divisional Major should be aware of its particular demands and risks. They face the challenges of interdisciplinary work and must grapple with the conceptual processes of disparate disciplines. They must establish criteria for selecting courses and organize their courses in order to obtain an adequate base in the fields necessary for advanced work on a specific topic.

Students in a Special Divisional Major may get little help in designing their programs. Because they are in separate, independent programs, they forfeit some of the services normally provided as part of a departmental or special major. They must, for example, find their own advisers. They need to ask the help of faculty members already committed to other departments and programs who may not share their interdisciplinary interests. They must acquire the necessary background and sustain their interest without the help of any special seminar. They may lose other advantages of departmental affiliation, such as priority for acceptance in restricted-enrollment courses, opportunities to meet students and faculty members with similar interests, and participation in a program easily understood by graduate schools and others. Their transcripts will carry only the notation "Special Divisional Major," without specifying the student's field of concentration.

Before applying for a Special Divisional Major, students are urged to consult the directors of undergraduate studies (DUSes) in their fields of major interest, who can advise them whether a Special Divisional Major is necessary. Special interests can usually be accommodated within an existing major.

## PREREQUISITES

Because of the variety of programs, there are no uniform prerequisites. All students must satisfy their prospective advisers and the Committee that they have obtained adequate preparation for the advanced courses and senior projects they propose.

## REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

The major ordinarily comprises at least twelve advanced term courses and a senior project. Advanced courses include all but prerequisites for majors, beginning language courses, and comparable courses. When appropriate, approval is granted for graduate courses, tutorials, and residential college seminars. No distinction is made in the Special Divisional Major between standard and intensive majors.

The DUS in the Special Divisional Major presents proposals for the major to the Committee on Honors and Academic Standing. General problems connected with a student's program may be discussed with the DUS. Students who revise their original proposal or change faculty advisers must obtain the Committee's approval. The Committee advises the Yale College Faculty whether or not the student has completed a major and may not be able to recommend students for the degree who have changed their programs without proper consultation.

**Credit/D/Fail** Courses taken Credit/D/Fail may not be counted toward the major.

## SENIOR REQUIREMENT

No later than midterm of their seventh term of enrollment, and after consultation with their faculty advisers, students provide the Committee with an outline of their plans for the senior project. There are several options: a written or oral examination, a senior essay or project, or, in some circumstances, a graduate course or a tutorial. A senior essay usually offers the most effective means of integrating material from more than one discipline, and students in a Special Divisional Major typically request one course credit in each term of the senior year in SPEC 491, 492, The Senior Project.

Students who offer a yearlong senior project must, in order to continue the course into the second term, provide their advisers with substantial written evidence of their progress (i.e., a draft or detailed outline) by the end of their seventh term. The project must be completed no later than two weeks before the last day of classes in the student's eighth term of enrollment. At least two faculty members evaluate it.

## ADVISING AND APPLICATION TO THE MAJOR

**Advisers** Candidates must arrange for faculty advisers before applying. DUSes or department chairs can usually suggest advisers. The Committee expects each student to obtain a primary adviser from the department that forms the principal component of the major, as well as one or more adjunct advisers from other fields. The primary adviser must be a regular member of the Yale College faculty. Members of the faculties of other schools of the University and visiting faculty members may serve as adjunct advisers.

Both advisers and students assume special responsibilities when designing and completing a major that falls outside existing programs. The special nature of the program and the student's loss of departmental affiliation make it particularly important for the faculty adviser to meet regularly with the student to help plan the program and to supervise its completion, including the senior project.

The primary adviser assumes chief responsibility for reporting the student's progress to the Committee and for assigning a grade to the senior project. The primary adviser also consults the student's other advisers and works with them in directing, evaluating, and grading the senior project.

**Application** Students considering a Special Divisional Major are invited to talk with DUSes and with their residential college deans at any stage in their planning. Candidates may apply for admission as early as their fourth term of enrollment, but must have done so no later than one month after their seventh term of enrollment begins. The Committee's experience suggests that the last term of the sophomore or the first term of the junior year is the best time to apply.

Lucidity, coherence, and completeness in an application are of primary importance to a student's candidacy, since they are indications of a thoughtfully prepared program of study and of the qualities of eagerness and initiative essential to a successful Special Divisional Major. The Committee expects that applicants will have worked in close collaboration with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS) of the Special Divisional Major in developing their proposals, and it will normally view failure to do so as grounds for rejection of the application.

Application forms are available at the Timothy Dwight College Dean's Office. They are submitted, along with letters of support from faculty advisers, to the Committee on Honors and Academic Standing, in care of the Timothy Dwight College Dean's Office. The Committee meets to consider proposals several times a year. All students in good standing are eligible, although the Committee must be satisfied that candidates have particular aptitude and preparation for the work they propose.

In approving or rejecting proposals for a Special Divisional Major, the Committee looks principally at the quality of the student's planning. What are the objectives of the program? What are the principles for selecting courses and organizing material? Is the program comparable in breadth and depth to other majors in Yale College? What provisions have been made to guide and evaluate the student's progress? What sort of senior project would focus and integrate the program? Finally, are the objectives of the program best served by a Special Divisional Major? The Committee will not approve a major if the student can accomplish the desired aims in an existing major; the Committee may consult DUSes and other faculty members to judge whether or not this is the case.

## REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

**Prerequisite** Approval of 2 or more faculty advisers and Committee on Honors and Academic Standing

**Number of courses** 13 term courses (incl one-term senior essay) or 14 term courses (incl two-term senior essay)

**Distribution of courses** Advanced courses in 2 or more appropriate depts; grad courses, college sems, or tutorials with DUS permission

**Senior requirement** Senior essay or project (SPEC 491 and/or 492), or, with DUS permission, written or oral exam, grad course, or tutorial