Self-Designed Majors

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What is a Self-Designed Major?

Students at The College of New Jersey can earn an undergraduate degree (BA) with an approved self-designed major. The self-designed major enables students with exceptional drive and creativity to complete an academic major through a course of studies that cannot be accommodated by existing degree programs. This is particularly attractive for students who are prepared to undertake extensive work in interdisciplinary areas such as cognitive science, political economy, or religious studies. However, it also affords opportunities for in-depth studies in a single discipline that TCNJ does not offer as a major at the present time. Students interested in tailoring a curriculum to meet specific educational and career goals are encouraged to explore possibilities with faculty members and to seek their advice for implementing a plan.

Examples of Self-Designed Majors at TCNJ

Among the self-designed majors that have been approved in past years are individualized studies of: art conservation; biomedical engineering with an electrical engineering concentration; classical studies; cognitive science; creative writing; editing and publishing; education, race, and American culture; film and television production;; linguistics and Spanish; medical illustration; Middle Eastern studies; music journalism and communications; pedagogical science; religious studies; and Russian studies.

Who should consider applying for a Self-Designed Major?

TCNJ's Self-Designed Major has been designed as an honors-level program for highly motivated and independent students who are willing to commit themselves to a rigorous course of studies. To be eligible for consideration, students must have completed at least one semester at TCNJ with not less than a 3.0 Grade Point Average. However, all students and prospective students with an interest in the program are welcome to write to the program coordinator at any time.

When should a student apply for a Self-Designed Major?

Students can submit a proposal as soon as they have completed one semester at TCNJ with at least a 3.0 Grade Point Average but no later than the first semester of the junior year.

What are the specifications for a Self-Designed Major proposal?

The proposed major should consist of at least twelve course units or equivalent. Generally, no more than four of the courses may be completed at other institutions, no more than three of the courses may be conducted as independent studies, and at least half of the courses must be at the 300 or 400 level. Exceptions may be made for transfer students. Elementary foreign language courses (101-103) cannot be counted toward the completion of the major. The proposal must include a carefully crafted capstone project that unifies the major by pulling together the strands of the proposed coursework and includes a thesis or paper of appropriate kind and length.

How does a student develop a proposal for a Self-Designed Major?

Students interested in developing a proposal should consult with faculty in each of the departments in which they expect to take extensive coursework to discover whether appropriate full-time faculty would be willing to serve as faculty advisors. After securing faculty support and formulating a preliminary proposal, they should meet with the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program. Students who are unsure which departments to consult or whether their ideas for a Self-Designed Major proposal are likely to be approved should meet with the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program for preliminary advice. After securing a faculty advisor (or advisors) and obtaining advice from the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program, students may proceed to develop a formal proposal. This proposal should include: (1) a statement of interest, goals, and justification; (2) a list of the courses that will constitute the major; (3) a detailed description of the senior capstone project and the ways in which it will unify the major as a whole. A draft of the formal proposal must be submitted to the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program. The Coordinator may suggest further revisions or send it directly to the Committee.

How are proposals for Self-Designed Majors approved?

When a proposal is ready for presentation, the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program will send it to the Self-Designed Major Committee and schedule a meeting for its presentation by the student, accompanied by one or more faculty advisors. At the Committee meeting, the student will be asked to provide a brief overview of the proposal and answer any questions that Committee members may have. Clarifications may also be sought from the faculty advisors accompanying the applicant. The Committee will vote to approve or reject the proposal or may ask for revisions and resubmission. Proposals that include courses that are normally reserved for majors in particular departments may require signatures of enrollment permission from the chairs of those departments.

Revision of Approved Self-Designed Majors

In order to graduate with a self-designed major, a student must successfully complete all of the courses listed on the approval form submitted to the Office of Records and Registration. Occasionally, a substitution may become necessary because a listed course is no longer given or because it is given at a time that conflicts with other graduation requirements that a student must complete. In such cases, a student in the Self-Designed Major Program must ask his or her primary faculty advisor to submit a request for substitution to the Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major Program. If both the faculty advisor and the Coordinator approve this request, the Coordinator will submit the substitution to the Office of Records and Registration. The student may also be required to submit a new, signed approval form to the Office of Records and Registration.

Contact for Further information

For further information, please write to Richard Kamber, Professor of Philosophy and Coordinator of the Self-Designed Major program, at: rkamber@tcnj.edu.