

**STUDENT GUIDE
FOR AN INDIVIDUALIZED MAJOR
AT WINTHROP UNIVERSITY**

March 2013

INTRODUCTION

Why does the Individualized Studies Program exist?

Research and teaching are organized by discipline and most students choose to major in one of these traditional areas of study. Some students, however, find that the issues and questions that interest them most are not adequately addressed by a single disciplinary approach, or by a double major, but require methods and knowledge from a variety of fields. In some cases, Winthrop University has already established interdisciplinary programs addressing those interests, such as the Environmental Sciences and Studies Programs or the Integrated Marketing Communication Program. However, some students may be interested in other areas of study that transcend disciplinary boundaries. The Individualized Studies major is intended to provide these students with an opportunity to design a structured and coherent course of study around a “theme.” Students will work with appropriate faculty to ensure that the courses selected adequately address their learning goals and fulfill all requirements.

What is an Individualized Studies (IDVS) major?

The Individualized Studies major is a structured plan of study that incorporates 36 credits of courses, is thematically focused, and draws from at least two departments. While it is expected that students will work largely within the College of Arts and Sciences, each person is free to reach beyond the college when developing the plan of study. The student-designed plan must include a research methods course that is appropriate for the subject under investigation, a class with an international focus, and two IDVS senior capstone project courses.

Students in the IDVS major are responsible for forming an Advisory Committee composed of three faculty members knowledgeable about the proposed areas of study. The Advisory Committee will work with each student to review these areas, create a curriculum plan outlining which courses will be taken to meet the credit requirements, and approve any changes to the study plan. The Advisory Committee must include an Arts and Sciences faculty mentor with credentials closest to the student’s study focus and two additional faculty members with expertise in the student’s areas of interest. With the guidance of the Advisory Committee, the student will develop a plan of study that is both academically sound and rigorous.

What an Individualized Studies major is not:

The IDVS option is designed for high achieving Winthrop students whose interests reach beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. It is not, however, intended for students who want to concentrate their studies on a narrow, pre-professional curriculum. And, while many students have interests in topics or themes that cross disciplines, the IDVS option should not be taken if the student’s interests can be served by a double major or by combining a traditional major with a minor already laid out in the Winthrop Catalogue. Likewise, the Individualized Major is not a way for students to style a new academic program as a means of avoiding course requirements in already established programs.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Exploration: Discuss your idea with the Program Director and explore how to pursue it (e.g., classes, internships, study abroad). You must have a 3.0 GPA after completing 30 or more credit hours (or after having started your third semester). Ideally, you will complete the application process during their sophomore year. Students with 90 or more credit hours are only admitted at the discretion of the Program Director given special circumstances (e.g., the student only recently transferred to the University).

2. Draft Application: Draft a statement of purpose and plan of study and then meet with the Program Director. The statement of purpose must convince the Coordinating Committee (think “Review Board”) that you have carefully thought through your goals and plan and are proposing a rigorous program of study with clear academic merit. It should be 2-3 double-spaced pages in 12pt font, well-organized, clearly written, and free from grammatical errors. Include the following four components:

- a. **Academic focus:** Identify the major’s themes, issues, questions and/or problems. Be sure the focus is conceptually coherent. Title the major accurately, avoiding names of traditional majors where possible. For example, “Science Communication and Sports” might be confused with the existing “Science Communication” major. Consider instead “Sport Promotion” or “Sport, Communication, and Society.” Other acceptable titles would include “International Child Welfare and Rights,” “Environmental Writing,” and “Mass Media, Popular Culture, and Entrepreneurship.”
- b. **Academic Content:** Identify departments and courses drawn upon to cover the specified academic focus. Carefully consider the courses you will take. Explain the themes that emerge and what will be gained from those themes. Additionally, explain internships, field experiences, and/or study abroad experiences that will enhance the major. You must provide a coherent, academically rigorous plan and show why existing majors fail to meet your learning objectives.
- c. **Personal Background:** Identify past experiences (courses, research projects, jobs, internships) that have shaped your decision to design this individualized major.
- d. **Academic and Career Goals:** Explain how your specific academic and career goals and how your major will help achieve them. For example, you might explain how your major might enhance your chances of participating in a competitive study abroad program, secure a highly desirable internship, or gain admission to a specific sort of graduate school program. You may need to research specific graduate school or career options to present a convincing argument. You need not specify only one plan as you might instead detail a number of options that your major will provide.

Provide also a chronologically organized plan of study showing when you will complete the specified courses and other activities (e.g., internships).

3. Identify Faculty Advisory Committee: Identify your primary advisor and two additional Winthrop faculty members who will form your Faculty Advisory Committee and meet with them to help you develop your ideas. Solicit feedback on your proposal’s focus, title, academic

content, and statement of purpose. Consult faculty well before the submission deadline. Each will need to sign the proposal.

4. Submit Application: Revise your materials based on feedback from your advisors and obtain their signatures on the appropriate form. Submit to the Program Director your (1) Statement of Purpose, (2) Plan of Study, and (3) unofficial transcript obtained from Degree Works. The Coordinating Committee will evaluate whether the proposal forms a cohesive, conceptually sound, rigorous major and the feasibility of completing the planned courses and related experiences (e.g. internship, study abroad).

5. Proposal Presentation: Attend the Individualized Studies Coordinating Committee meeting. Prepare a short (two to three minutes) explanation of your major and be prepared to answer questions about your major and future plans. The Committee meets only once each Fall and Spring semester.

Working with Faculty Advisors

The Faculty Advisory Committee

Designing an individualized degree program will require you to work collaboratively with three faculty members who will make up your advisory committee. From these three faculty members, you must identify one who will serve as your primary advisor and two additional members who will form the rest of the committee. Your primary advisor must be an Arts and Sciences faculty member. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this degree program, you will need to ask faculty members from at least two different departments.

How To Choose An Appropriate Faculty Advisor?

It is critical that you identify tenure-track or tenured Winthrop faculty members who are actively involved in teaching or conducting research in the disciplines you are interested in. In order to identify these advisors, talk to professors of the classes that you have previously taken or plan to take in the future. Additionally, consider faculty members that you have a good relationship with or who have provided you with positive feedback on the direction you want to go. If you do not have anyone specific in mind, see who is teaching courses that you are interested in taking.

Working With Your Advisory Committee

In order to be successful within this degree program, you will have to work closely with both your primary advisor and the two other members of the advisory committee. You must meet with the Advisory Committee before you apply in order to discuss your statement of purpose and your potential plan of study. This meeting will be most effective if you bring along an unofficial copy of your transcript and any additional information/materials that you think may be relevant. Collectively, this will help your faculty advisors to see what your goals are for the individualized degree program, what your academic interests and strengths are, and what coursework you have completed to date. The clearer you can be in articulating what it is that

you want to do, the easier it will be to get productive feedback from faculty members. Make sure that you do your best work even before you meet with your Advisory Committee members.

During this first meeting, the feedback you receive from the Advisory Committee will be most important so come prepared with questions to elicit their thoughts about how to formulate your statement of purpose and plan of study. Some potential questions may include:

1. Does my statement of purpose effectively convey my plans for my major? Are my goals and motivation for pursuing this individualized degree program clear? Do you have suggestions for revisions?
2. Have I included the most relevant courses within my individualized degree program? Are there alternative courses that you think would be beneficial to put into my degree plan?
3. Do you think that this plan of study will help me to meet my career goals and/or preparation for graduate school?

In addition to these questions, here are some basic tips for establishing a successful rapport with your advisory committee: 1) Communicate effectively with your advisors both via email and in meetings, 2) be punctual, 3) respond to communications in a timely fashion; 4) use office hours as you may find that you achieve better results if you approach your advisor in person and at a time that s/he has set aside for student consultations; 5) be punctual and follow up on any agreements; 6) take ownership of the work that needs to be done to complete this program.

Remember that your relationship with the Advising Committee doesn't end after they approve the Plan of Study. They will continue to be good sources of advice and information as you pursue your studies, choose internships and study abroad programs, and make plans for employment or graduate school.

Timing of Application

It is your responsibility to begin communicating with your potential advisors as soon as you possibly can. It is likely that your plan will change when they give you feedback. When you have finalized your statement of purpose and completed your proposed plan of study, you will need to meet with each of your faculty advisors again.

NOW THAT YOU ARE AN INDIVIDUALIZED STUDIES MAJOR

Roles of Students & Faculty Advisors in the Individualized Degree Program

You will be responsible for working with your primary advisory to determine the academic direction and focus of your major. This will require regular meetings and discussions about your ideas, proposed coursework, and the progression of your final project. They will primarily be responsible for assessing your final project and so it is critical that you meet with them to get feedback throughout the course of your study.

Registering for courses

As an IDVS major you will be registering for courses in a variety of programs, departments, and/or colleges from across the institution. Therefore, it is important that you understand the registration policies of the programs, departments, and colleges in which you plan to take classes. It is worth noting that some academic units:

- Restrict access to certain courses for students from other programs.
- Impose GPA prerequisites for certain courses.
- Require students to seek permission from the instructor prior to registering for a class.
- Give first priority to their majors at registration time.

Please do not be discouraged by these rules and regulations. If you are well-informed, organized, and persistent, then you will be able to register successfully for the courses that you wish to take. The Department of Interdisciplinary Studies can offer general information about registration procedures for the departments and programs most relevant to your academic plan of study. However, you are ultimately responsible for working through these issues and it is crucial that you try and address them before you meet with your faculty advisor. For detailed advice regarding registering, consult the Office of Records and Registration.

Helpful hints

- Know whether the course that you want to take has prerequisites, requires permission from the instructor, and/or is popular with majors.
- If the course has prerequisites, then be sure you have taken them. (It is rare to have prerequisites waived; waivers are generally granted only when you have taken a course at another institution that corresponds to the specified prerequisite.)
- If the course requires permission from the professor, then be sure to follow the appropriate procedures.
- If the course appears to be full, then contact the instructor and explain why you would like to enroll in the class. A gracious, detailed e-mail with information about yourself (name, year, title of your major) and why you want to take the class (explain how it fits into your individualized major) is a good place to start. Face-to-face contact, however, may be more effective. Visit the professor during her or his office hours. Attend the first class meeting and speak with the instructor at the end of lecture. Many professors are willing to make room for an enthusiastic, motivated student.

Changing your plan of study

There will be times when a student finds it necessary to modify their individualized plan of study. In order to do this, it is your responsibility to discuss such changes with the IDVS Director and your primary faculty advisor. Additionally, you must mention and discuss these changes with the remaining members of your Advisory Committee, especially when the proposed alterations are in their field of expertise.

If the changes are relatively small (one or two courses) and perfectly consistent with your plan of study, then the IDVS director will provide pre-registration approval. If the changes are more substantial, then the IDVS director will ask you to seek pre-registration approval from your

primary faculty advisor as well. Additionally, if you have made changes to your plan of study, then your Advisory Committee members (if the changes are in their fields) will need to sign a “change in plan of study” form, generally filed with a final plan of study.

If you wish to alter the concept of your major, then this will require the approval of the Individualized Studies Coordinating Committee. Please consult with the IDVS director about the steps you need to take.

ENRICHMENT EXPERIENCES

Internships

Internships are a great opportunity for you to gain valuable experience related to your major or career interest and to help you begin networking in the professional arena. Internships may be completed for credit, but need not be. We strongly encourage you to include an internship for credit in your plan of study. When completing an internship for credit, you will need to identify a faculty supervisor and enroll in an internship course in the faculty supervisor’s department. Your faculty supervisor will typically expect you to do relevant reading and writing, allowing you to reflect on your internship experiences and make connections between your internship and your academic work.

1. Finding an internship

If you know you want to do an internship, visit the Center for Career and Civic Engagement, located in Crawford Hall or on the web at <http://www.winthrop.edu/cce/default.aspx?id=18624>. You may also find internship listings and advice on various departmental web sites. You may also look at various opportunities beyond university resources for internships. Your supervisor (see item 2) members may assist you in identifying opportunities in various offices of state or local government, in schools, in community centers, in volunteer organizations, with political or advocacy groups, or in a variety of businesses.

2. Identifying a faculty supervisor

If you wish to complete an internship for credit, you will need to contact a faculty member to supervise your internship. Some departments have specific faculty who supervise internships. In other departments, the supervisor can be any faculty member. Your faculty supervisor will be responsible for assigning your grade. S/he will also help you articulate the specific learning experiences that you both deem important for you to get the most benefit from the internship experience.

Please be aware of prerequisites for internship courses and plan ahead. To receive credit for an internship, you must register prior to undertaking the work. Normally, registration for an internship involves getting permission from your faculty supervisor’s department. This needs to be done prior to starting the internship! You CANNOT receive retroactive credit for internship work you have already completed!

3. Creating a learning contract

You will also need to create and implement a learning contract. This is a document crafted between the student, internship site supervisor, and faculty supervisor to assist you in identifying skills, knowledge, and experiences you hope to gain while on internship. The internship should be designed to help you integrate, consolidate, and apply what you have learned from the various facets of your on-campus program. This contract will need to be signed by you, your faculty supervisor, and your internship site supervisor.

What should I be aware of?

- Give yourself lots of time. You should begin this process nine months to a year in advance. Many companies and organizations look for interns in the fall for the following summer or fall semester.
- If you complete your internship during fall or spring semester, your regular tuition will cover the cost of internship credits. If you plan to complete your internship during the summer, be aware that you will be charged additional fees based on the number of credits to be completed.
- Each credit for internship work must entail at least 50 hours of work and the required number of work hours must be clearly stated in your internship contract.
- The Individualized Studies Program does not forbid monetary payment for internship work, provided that such payment is incidental to the experiential learning to be gained from the work. However, individual departments may choose to forbid monetary payment for internships under the supervision of their faculty.
- Some internships allow students to participate in organizations and advocacy groups that perform or disseminate research, or engage in legislative lobbying, in order to affect the content of legislation or budgetary decisions. The program recommends that internship supervisors not assign student interns to activities supportive of legislation or budget decisions directly affecting Winthrop University. It is especially in the best interests of the university that none of its interns be engaged in face-to-face legislative lobbying for the university.
- The type of grading (S/U or Letter Grades) for an internship depends in part on the department that is supervising your internship. Your faculty advisor will be able to let you know what type of grading applies to your internship.

An internship is an invaluable experience. It offers you insight into a particular career path. It gives you practical work experience. It provides an opportunity to network with other people who share your interests. The knowledge, skills, and connections that you acquire through an internship will be a key asset as you seek employment or apply to graduate or professional schools.

Study Abroad

An Individualized Studies degree creates a wonderful opportunity to study abroad! Through Winthrop University Study Abroad programs students can earn credit towards their degrees at many universities throughout the world. For Winthrop affiliated programs, students generally pay Winthrop tuition, room and board, plus a study abroad fee, and are able to use scholarships and other forms of financial aid. You should check out each program carefully, as each

program has its own specific goals, lengths of study, and prerequisites. In addition to semester long study abroad opportunities, the International Center offers short-term study abroad opportunities (between one week and two months), which are led by individual faculty members. You may read about all of these exciting programs on the International Center website at studyabroad@winthrop.edu. The International Center, located in 218 Dinkins, offers group study abroad advising sessions, which you must sign up for before you make an individual appointment with the study abroad coordinator to start planning your semester abroad. If you don't have a passport already, go ahead and apply for one and start planning your semester abroad!

Be sure to plan ahead for this invaluable experience and be sure to discuss your dreams with your faculty advisor.