

CHECK LIST FOR PROPOSING AN INDIVIDUAL MAJOR

- ❖ Individual Majors must be approved by a CIS Faculty Review Committee (FRC). This check list describes the steps in preparing a proposal to present to an FRC. There are samples of successful proposals available for review in the CIS office.
- ❖ Once your proposal is approved, you may pursue the major it describes. Any changes must be reviewed by the CIS Director, who will determine whether the major ought to be re-evaluated.

Your proposal must include:

- Your name, class, advisor, and the date of your proposal (please date each new draft). Most proposals are around 4-6 pages long.
- The *title and description* of your proposed individual major. *What is your topic or area of study?*
- A *rationale* for the major that 1) explains the coherence of your subject and its relation to other areas of study, 2) addresses the opportunities for focused study of your subject at St. Olaf, and 3) connects your subject to the values of the college. *Why is this a good liberal arts major for a college like St. Olaf?*
- A list of the 10-12 courses, seminars, independent studies, and/or experiential learning that will be the “requirements” of your major, followed by brief explanations of how each contributes to the goals of the major. Indicate any already completed or currently enrolled. At least two courses must be advanced work – usually Level III. Schedule two additional Level III units for the senior project. You may also include a list of alternative or supplementary courses. It is often useful to group the courses into different categories.
- A description of learning and life experience leading up to this proposal. *Why does this major make sense for you?* Include factors that show how well prepared you are to carry out an independent plan and a complex independent project.
- An preliminary description of a potential *senior integrative project*, including its relationship to your other work in the major; the format for the final product(s); resources you would need; possibilities for public presentation; and how it would be evaluated. *What kind of work do you envision doing?*
- A description of the index page of your *web portfolio*, including potential conceptual links within your major and with outside resources. Visit <http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/cis/webcommunity.htm> to see how different students have chosen to organize their web portfolios (check the archive page for recent classes).
- A *course grid* or similar plan showing your schedule for completing your major and other graduation requirements. A course grid form is available from the CIS, or you can show your plan on a separate page.

In addition, the CIS office will request the following before we schedule your FRC:

- Recommendation form(s), including comments on a near-final draft of the proposal, from the faculty member who has agreed to be your advisor and from an additional faculty consultant if you have one.
- A recommendation form from a reference librarian after consultation about research strategies in the field(s) of the major and availability of library resources for the major and the senior project.

Faculty signatures on these recommendation forms indicate their support of your proposed individual major and willingness to work with you as you carry out your planned course of study and senior project.

Aids for composing a description of your individual major:

A description presents the central subject of your major in a clear paragraph. It answers the question, What is this major about?

1. Include a topic sentence
(“What I plan to study is...”)
2. Include a description of subtopics, or components, of your proposed major
(“In order to understand my subject, I will need to know about these things, and I will need to develop these skills...”)
3. List some of the main questions that inspire and will guide your studies
(“As I think about my topic I find these focusing questions...”)
4. List departmental (and other) resources you can use to learn the things you want to learn.

Aids for composing a rationale for your individual major.

A rationale is an explanation of the validity of your proposed major, and a justification for completing your major at St. Olaf. It answers the question, Why is it appropriate to do this major at St. Olaf? Here are some things you might address in a rationale.

1. Explain why your subject is important.
2. Show that your subject doesn't duplicate an established major.
3. Show that your major progresses from basic material to more sophisticated approaches – that is, that you are not just sampling introductory courses in many areas but finding ways to explore your topic in depth.
4. Show that your plan makes good use of available resources.
5. Justify the combination of areas in your major.
(Explain how the parts fit together and how learning in one area of the major reinforces learning in other areas.)
6. Justify the inclusion of your major in the curriculum of a liberal arts college.
(Explain how your subject relates to classic concerns of the liberal arts, for example, perennial human questions about values, truth, or beauty; appreciation for historical contexts or circumstances; and critical interpretation and analysis of varied phenomena.)
7. Give reasons for including your major specifically at St. Olaf College.
(Explain how the subject relates to the distinct interests of St. Olaf, like those included in the college's public statements about itself. Some examples: Will your major help develop a “global perspective”? Will it prepare you for a life “of worth and service”? Will your major connect you to

the traditional interests of the liberal arts? Is your major consistent with the values of a college that is “rooted in the gospel”?)