

## **Interdisciplinary and Independent Major Clarification**

*A White Paper concerning interdisciplinary majors and course registration.*

White Paper No. 6

A number of students have expressed their frustration during registration when they cannot get into required classes for their independent or interdisciplinary major. The current course registration system is able to offer priority to upperclassmen students for courses within their major. The program currently cannot account for the course requirements for interdisciplinary and independent majors. The purpose of this white paper is to alleviate these specific concerns by outlining steps that both students and faculty can take to ensure all students can meet requirements for these majors.

For the 2014 Fall registration, there will be fourteen Independent Interdisciplinary majors registering for courses across the entire student body. Their majors are very diverse and do not overlap with their requirements, which only exacerbates the problem at hand. It makes it extremely hard to create a system where those who are designing their own majors will be able to make effective course request through Course Registration.

Students, in particular, may help alleviate this problem for themselves through early communication and consultation. The following steps are meant to help students limit this problem, although we acknowledge some classes may still prove problematic. This advice is also applicable to students looking to complete minors, other requirements, or simply explore their interests in a different field.

1. Know what classes you need
  - a. Create tracks/requirements early when you declare your major
  - b. Research when classes will be offered, understanding professors may be on sabbatical
  - c. Have alternatives, watch for relevant topics classes or other new classes
2. Communicate Early
  - a. Explain to professors why you are interested in a class and how it relates to your major
  - b. Communicate with professors prior to course registration
  - c. Work with your advisor to be sure you have alternatives and are making progress in fulfilling all requirements
3. Communicate Professionally
  - a. Explain your situation, when possible share a description of your major and its requirements
  - b. Do not demand a SPAC code
  - c. Also explain why the course you are requesting interests you or makes you excited to take. This explanation will motivate more professors to

open their class to you.

4. Make sure you understand how the course registration process works and work with your advisor if you have any questions

We are asking CAPP, faculty, department chairs to also help students navigate the system and more easily fulfill all degree requirements in an efficient manner.

1. Be open to working with students with interdisciplinary or independent interdisciplinary majors
2. Take advantage of opportunities to cross list classes or give priority to different programs in the registration system
3. Program directors and department chairs please also help us make all faculty members aware of the opportunity to cross list and give different priorities in the registration system
4. When possible, help students connect with other faculty who offer or may be able to suggest other relevant courses

This advice will not eliminate all frustrations with course registration, but may prove useful for navigating this situation. Being proactive and having open and honest communication with advisors and faculty will make the process more efficient for all involved. DePauw Student Government would like to thank Kelley Hall and Ken Kirkpatrick for meeting with senators to discuss these issues. The senators who wrote this piece of legislation would also like to thank students for bringing these concerns to them, and urge students to continue to contact DSG with any issues.

Motion by:



Seconded by:



Aye: 24

Nay: 0

Absent: 0



Walker Chance, President

Attest:



Colleen McArdle, Secretary

## Addendum

After Senator Katie Kondry, Senator Clark Edwards, and Senator Ryan Pranger had several conversations with Ken Kirkpatrick, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, and Kelly Hall, Associate Dean of Academic Life, the Senators seemed to be at a loss for what could be effectively done concerning these issues. Then we corresponded with Dr. Dave Berque, Dean of Academic Life and Greenleaf Professor of Computer Science, about some of the concerns that were raised by some of those within these specific categories of majors; Interdisciplinary and Independent Interdisciplinary.

### Defining these terms:

- Interdisciplinary majors are those in which they blend between Independent Interdisciplinary and regular majors. Some of these Interdisciplinary majors include those of Conflict Studies and Film Studies which have a core set of classes that must be taken and then they design the rest of their major to take specific classes. While these core classes they have priority to take, the rest of their courses are not cross listed to allow for their entry. This is due to the lack of cross listing as done by professors which severely limits students ability to complete their majors.
- The Independent Interdisciplinary majors, also referred to as Independent majors, are designed by each individual student with the help of their faculty advisors and approved by the Office of Academic Life. Each student therefore has hand picked their specific classes to allow them to major in something that is not currently offered at DePauw. This means that it would be extremely hard to create a system that can account for these Independent majors to give them the classes they need to graduate.

### Administrative Actions Thus Far:

After Dave Berque corresponded with Senator Clark Edwards, Senator Katie Kondry, and Senator Ryan Pranger, he met with Kelley Hall and Ken Kirkpatrick, to address our concerns with two different steps. First, he contacted the directors of all the Interdisciplinary majors and encouraged them to identify courses that are required of their students. He also encouraged the directors to contact the faculty teaching these courses (and relevant department chairs) to ask them to consider assigning the courses priority for their interdisciplinary majors.

Additionally, he contacted the fourteen students who are Independent Interdisciplinary

majors to acknowledge their problem and to give them advice on requesting SPAC codes for courses that they absolutely must enroll in to complete their majors.

Berque acknowledged that these attempts to solve the problem are not comprehensive but they are a starting point. The only way to truly make an effective change is to change the registration system completely, as articulated by Ken Kirkpatrick. Less structural but more interpersonal and informative solutions may be to make the course registration process easier for both students and faculty.