

BEREA COLLEGE GUIDELINES FOR INDEPENDENT MAJOR PROPOSALS

Independent Majors are an option available to students who wish to pursue a field of study that cannot be met through an established major department at Berea College. While this list is not exhaustive, some examples of previously approved Independent Majors are Appalachian Studies, Classical Studies or Classical Civilizations, and Sustainable Community Development.

All students who plan to propose an Independent Major are expected to talk with the Teaching Faculty members they would like to have as their primary and secondary Independent Major advisors **at least one term before declaring the major**. (Each advisor must be above the rank of instructor and a member of the Teaching Faculty from one of the departments with course work included in the proposed major curriculum. Typically, the primary advisor would be from the academic department in which the greatest number of courses would be taken. The secondary advisor would be either from the department with a number of courses in the major or someone who can provide the student with guidance in an area related to the field of study.)

The [Berea College Catalog](#) defines a major as follows:

At Berea College, the term "major" describes one of the three parts of each student's undergraduate curriculum (the other two parts being the General Education curriculum and the student's self-selected elective courses). The major is a set of courses selected to provide an opportunity for a student to undertake study in depth. The College offers majors in disciplinary and interdisciplinary departments, and student-designed independent majors. A major field of study has these aspects:

- A central core of method, theory, and content;
- A formal integration of the diversity of topics and analytical tools within the field of study;
- An intellectual sequence of study that moves to increasingly complex and sophisticated understandings; and
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate some mastery of the field of study's nature, tools, central questions, arguments, history, philosophical presuppositions, limits, etc.

It is also understood that a curriculum that represents a major cannot provide full coverage of all of that field of study and that the major's size will be limited to respect the traditional eight-term duration of undergraduate study. Unless approved by Faculty action for exceptional reasons, a major consists of 8 to 12 course credits selected from department offerings. Majors often require additional collateral courses, with the sum of disciplinary or interdisciplinary department offerings and collateral courses being no more than 16 course credits, unless additional course credits are approved by Faculty action. A student-designed Independent Major would be guided by the same principles.

Students wishing to declare an Independent Major should review the forms and begin working with their advisors on their Independent Major proposal, adhering to the guidelines below. The Independent Major proposal will be completed via DocuSign. Upload and complete the required proposal forms found here: <https://www.berea.edu/curriculum-and-advising/independent-majors/>, and attach them to the DocuSign submission. If the Independent Major proposal is not approved by the deadline for that term, the student must resubmit the proposal and forms the following regular term.

To submit a complete and well-written proposal, each of the following parties has its own responsibilities.

Students should:

- Find at least one undergraduate major at another accredited four-year institution of higher education they would choose as a field of study if attending that school. This other school's major will be used as the model for the Berea College Independent Major. **Print out the Catalog information from the other school and submit that with the proposal.**

- Read the Definition of a Major (above) as defined by Berea College, and make sure that the proposed major program fulfills all of those criteria. (Their Independent Major advisors should assist with this.)
- Develop a [Rationale Statement](#) arguing why an Independent Major will be more advantageous to meeting the student's career and educational goals than would established majors and minors at Berea. If there are similar majors or minors at Berea, explain using detail and logic of why declaring a combination of those would not achieve the same goal or why the student cannot complete those departments during their remaining terms at Berea.
- Prepare a [Narrative](#) to accompany the Comparison Chart explaining how the proposed curriculum matches the other school's curriculum. Indicate the differences between the Berea Independent Major and their department, especially where there is no corresponding course or a corresponding course is not included in the proposed major.
- Prepare a [Comparison Chart](#) for the major program similar to what is being proposed at Berea for one other four-year school. In the first column of each chart, show the structure and content of the other school's department (core, concentration or focus, distribution, capstone, or however they refer to the various components). If the other school's major indicates students should "choose one/two/etc. of the following," indicate that instruction in the first column of the chart, then select the course(s) the student would take at the school if faced with that choice. Include ALL requirements from the other school's major, even those that do not seem to fit the student's needs/goals. Enter the URL Web address below the name of the other school on the chart so that the Associate Vice President and Dean of Curriculum and Student Success (Academic Program Council liaison) can access the information more efficiently during the review. (Also, include the copy mentioned above, in case requirements change between the time the proposal was written and it is reviewed.)
 In column two, working with the Independent Major advisors, list in a side-by-side comparison the comparable courses/experiences available at Berea (including transfer work) that the student and advisors plan to require in the Independent Major curriculum. If there is no comparable course, indicate such on the corresponding line. If there is a corresponding course, but the student and advisors chose not to include it in the proposed major, acknowledge this on the chart, then include an explanation in the narrative. Courses in the Berea IM curriculum that do not clearly match courses at the other school should be listed near the bottom of column two with "no comparable course" on the corresponding line in column one. At the bottom of each column, total up the number of courses (not credits) required by the school, including noncredit experiences/courses, and enter that number (i.e., ## Required Courses). **NOTE:** Please see the Word and Excel samples posted with the Independent Major Guidelines and forms at <https://www.berea.edu/curriculum-and-advising/independent-majors/>.
- With input from the primary and secondary Independent Major advisors, prepare a list of additional **On- and Off-campus Resources** (including people, centers, businesses, museums, organizations, etc.) accessible to the student while pursuing this plan of study. Include contact information (physical address, e-mail address, phone numbers, web address, etc.) for each entry.
- Consult with [Ed Poston](#), the Hutchins Library reference librarian, regarding the books, journals, magazines, newspapers, web sites, etc., available for the proposed Independent Major and develop a thorough [Bibliography](#). To make an appointment, please call 859-985-3172, or e-mail him at postonp@bereda.edu.
- Consult with the Independent Major advisors to complete the Electronic Curriculum Plan, which can be accessed through the DegreeWorks Degree Audit link under the "Academics" tab in myBerea and complete the [Independent Major Curriculum Guide](#) for the proposed major. Some matters to take into consideration:

- 1) Include ALL course work to be taken at Berea to complete the entire degree (past, current, and future course work). Be sure to meet the graduation requirement of a minimum of 32 course credits earned within the number of terms for which the student has been approved.
- 2) Use the Electronic Curriculum Plan and list the same courses on the Curriculum Guide that the degree-evaluation tool used to meet General Education requirements (particularly for the Perspective Areas, Active Learning Experience, and Practical Reasoning).
- 3) Designate 8-11 course credits as major courses in alphanumeric order by course ID number. List a capstone course/experience (typically a senior seminar or internship in one of the departments in which the student is taking major courses or another 400-level course in the field of study). List collateral courses in alphanumeric order by course ID number. These are required courses for the major, but will be counted toward the minimum of 21 courses taken outside the major. List no more than 16 required course credits, including major core courses, capstone, and collaterals.
- 4) Electives should be listed in alphanumeric order by course ID number and should complement the major and/or contribute to the breadth of a liberal-arts education. (Students can make changes to the list of electives, but need to show how they would complete degree requirements when they propose the Independent Major.)
- 5) If planning a Berea Term Abroad (BTA), students should list as major requirements only course work that can be completed at Berea College because there is no guarantee that students will be accepted into and/or complete that opportunity. Substitutions for courses completed in BTA can be submitted later to the Academic Program Council (APC) Liaison for review, with the approval of the Independent Major advisors.

- If unable to complete all degree requirements within the eight terms allowed, the student must submit a [Request for an Extension of Terms](#) along with the Independent Major proposal. Students are expected to complete all degree requirements within four academic years, or eight regular terms—including transfer terms for transfer students, terms abroad, off-campus field studies, internships, and the addition of one or more minors or additional majors, if any. Failure to follow the approved Curriculum Plan submitted as part of the Declaration of Primary Major (or Independent Major) process does not constitute a valid reason for needing an extension of terms. Students proposing an Independent Major that requires more than eight terms, even if a prior extension of terms was approved for another major, should include this request with their completed proposal; approvals will be coordinated by the Associate Vice President and Dean of Curriculum and Student Success.

Staff in the Office of Academic Services will coordinate the review process between the Associate Vice President and Dean of Curriculum and Student Success, who is responsible for approving 9th- and 10th-term extensions and is also responsible for approving the proposed Independent Major. Curriculum plans requiring an 11th term or more must be reviewed and approved by the Student Admissions and Academic Standing (SAAS) Committee. Rejections of 9th, 10th, or 11th term extensions can be appealed to the SAAS Committee.

- In the DocuSign form list the names and mail addresses of all required approval signatures. Any time the proposed Independent Major curriculum requires two or more courses in the same academic department (including core, capstone, and collaterals); the Department Chair must approve the major and its title. (**NOTE: Advisors and Department Chairs: See special instructions below before signing.**)
- After all of the information has been entered on the first page of DocuSign form, you will complete your information and electronically sign. **Before submitting**, you need to click the paperclip image and upload all of the required components. These need to be combined into one pdf file and arranged in the following order:
 - 1) [Independent Major Proposal Checklist](#) completed with included items checked
 - 2) Rationale statement describing educational and/or career goals and why no established major at Berea meets the student's goals/needs.

- 3) Major Comparison Charts Narrative
 - 4) Comparison Chart for the major department at another school on which the Independent Major has been modeled (with attached copy of the Catalog information from the other school);
 - 5) List of On- and Off-Campus Resources including people, institutions, etc. (with contact info) accessible to you in this area of study
 - 6) Bibliography of print and electronic resources available
 - 7) Completed Independent Major Curriculum Guide (plus guides for any other major you plan to declare or have declared). Be sure to consult your MyBerea Degree Evaluation to fill out the General Education requirement
 - 8) Printout of Electronic Curriculum Plan for all in-progress and future coursework. (If planning a Berea Term Abroad, list as major requirements only course work at Berea College; participation in/completion of BTA cannot be guaranteed.)
- Completed proposals must be submitted no later than the deadline posted at: <https://www.berea.edu/curriculum-and-advising/independent-majors/>.
 - If approved, follow the curriculum as approved, just as other Berea students follow established majors with rare deviation. Students may change when a course is taken if assured it will be offered again during their remaining terms, but cannot fail to complete a required course unless there are extenuating circumstances making it impossible to complete a course as planned. If unable to complete a major requirement due to extenuating circumstances, discuss a possible course substitution with the Independent Major advisors. If they agree to the substitution, they will submit a request to the APC Liaison along with a rationale explaining the reason the requirement could not be met and proposing a similar course as a substitution.
 - NOTE that the Academic Program Council (APC) has restricted the number of substitutions that can be made for Independent Majors. IF 25% OR MORE OF THE COURSES ORIGINALLY PROPOSED ARE SUBSTITUTED, THE INDEPENDENT MAJOR WILL HAVE TO BE REPROPOSED. To avoid this problem, please work with your Advisors to develop alternatives and include those alternatives in the curriculum plan. For example: Foundation/Introductory course REL 105 OR PHI 110; 4 of the following 6 courses...; etc. Substitutions will always be available to allow the addition of important courses that could not be planned or designed into the plan of study (Term Abroad, visiting professor, etc.) to the major.

Responsibilities for Independent Major Advisors:

1. Discuss whether an established Berea College major department (possibly in combination with another major or a minor) would achieve the student's career and educational goals before agreeing to help the student develop an Independent Major proposal. If an existing major is appropriate, encourage the student to consider that option.
2. Help student choose a rigorous, cohesive curriculum (mirroring those at other colleges/universities offering the same/similar major) using course work available to the Berea student (including transfer/exchange courses).
3. Determine whether the Berea Independent Major compares well with the programs at the other school. Help student develop a narrative to go with the Comparison Chart that explains the differences/deficiencies between the other school and the proposed Berea Independent Major. See previous instructions to students on the preparation of the chart and narrative.
4. Assist student in completing an Electronic Curriculum Plan:
 - a. Make certain that student knows how many terms they have remaining (especially students who transferred in college course work taken after high school, because they may have been charged with one or more terms that count in their eight-term limit).

- b. Help determine if the courses required in the Independent Major will be offered in the terms the student plans to take them. (Department Chairs also have this responsibility, because they will be aware of changes to the most recent *Catalog & Student Handbook* and *Schedule of Classes* information.)
 - c. Determine if the plan can be completed within the student's remaining terms. If not, can the plan be revised without compromising it or should the student request an extension of terms due to special circumstances?
5. Assist the student in finalizing the Curriculum Guide, as described above.
- a. Check to be certain that any future General Education course work listed on the Curriculum Guide is approved by the Committee on General Education (COGE) to meet each specific requirement.
 - b. Compare the Curriculum Guide to the Electronic Curriculum Plan to be certain that all future course work is reflected on the Guide and that the terms taken agree. (Between the Electronic Curriculum Plan and the MyBerea Degree Evaluation, ALL course work—General Education, Major, and Electives—should be reflected on the finalized Curriculum Guide.)
 - c. Make sure the terms indicated for when the student will take or has taken each course is in agreement with the Electronic Curriculum Plan and MyBerea Degree Evaluation.
 - d. Please emphasize to the student that, once the curriculum is approved, the student is bound to complete their proposed major program. Failure to take an approved course will not guarantee a student an extension of terms, nor will it guarantee that a course substitution will be approved. Changes to the approved curriculum should be rare and only be requested for good reasons (scheduled course not offered, unique opportunity to take a pertinent course that was not scheduled previously, two infrequently offered requirements being offered in the same term at the same class time, etc.). In the event a substitution is warranted, courses proposed to substitute must fill the same purpose in the Independent Major as did the original course.
 - e. Help student prepare a list of physical and human resources available in the area (excluding published resources listed in the Bibliography). The list should include names, addresses, and contact information for people, museums, centers, businesses, etc., that can provide the student with assistance and broader knowledge in the proposed major.
6. Help student develop a strong rationale for pursuing an Independent Major, rather than working with an established Berea College major and one or more minors, for example.
7. Make sure all components of the Independent Major proposal were attached and in the order listed above before electronically signing. If you also happen to be a Department Chair, please be sure to read over those responsibilities and electronically sign where indicated to attest that the proposal meets those criteria.

Responsibilities for Department Chairs:

- 1. Be certain the title of the major will not be confused with existing majors offered by your department and that this is a viable major that will prepare the student well for a career or future educational pursuits.
- 2. Review the Curriculum Guide in the attachment. Whenever two or more courses from your department are required in the major, capstone, and collaterals, your signature is required. Before you sign:
 - a. Be certain courses are scheduled to be offered in the terms the student indicates on the proposal, or ask them to make corrections. (If a course will not be offered again during the student's remaining terms, ask the student to discuss with the Independent Major advisors an alternate course or experience.)

- b. Point out to students potential timing conflicts (rare courses offered in the same term, which may conflict with each other or other courses required in that term, and so on)

After the completed proposal is submitted to the Associate Vice President and Dean of Curriculum and Student Success (in the Office of Academic Affairs, 320 Lincoln Hall):

- An Office of Academic Services staff member will check the proposal packet for completeness, log it into a database for tracking purposes. A copy of the proposal will also be forward to the Academic Program Council (APC) liaison.
- The APC liaison will evaluate the proposal and may approve it as submitted, request modifications, or deny the proposal. The student will be informed in writing of the APC liaison's decision.
- If the Independent Major is approved, the student will be required to follow the curriculum plan as approved by the APC, just as other students follow majors described in the *Berea College Catalog*. If denied, the student may appeal the decision to the APC chair or choose to declare another major.