

# Special Studies Degree Program

## Introduction

The Special Studies degree program at UB enables students to create an individualized academic major, from the vast curricular and faculty resources available at UB, which reflects a student's unique academic interests and aspirations. Special Studies majors are purposeful, coherent programs of study, sponsored and approved by the faculty, and allow students to achieve individualized academic goals. Students at the University at Buffalo may design a Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BS) in Special Studies, depending upon their academic goals and interests.

## Is a Special major right for me?

Students who have unique academic interests, not met by one of the established majors at UB, or who wish to create an interdisciplinary blend of majors, may want to pursue a degree in Special Studies.

Students must have achieved a minimum 2.5 GPA to apply for a special studies major.

The ideal time to submit a proposal is during the sophomore year or early in the junior year. This allows the student sufficient time to work with faculty sponsors to develop the major curriculum prior to submission of the proposal. Submitting proposals late in a student's academic career, after completion of most or all courses, is not in alignment with the requirement for deliberative design of a coherent academic program. A Special Studies degree is not a collection of courses but rather must reflect a purposefully designed path towards a defined academic goal.

## What is Required?

Students develop a special major proposal that includes support from two faculty sponsors. The proposal is then reviewed and approved by a faculty committee and the Dean of Undergraduate Education.

A well-constructed proposal clearly outlines the rationale for the special major, shows a deliberately formulated plan of study that defines and reflects the student's educational objectives at UB.

The proposal consists of the following:

1. Degree title: The title should reflect the purpose and content of the major.
2. Program description: This describes the academic purpose of the special major, including a description of the area of knowledge to be mastered through the special major.
3. Program Learning Objectives: Statements describing what the student will know and be able to do as a result of completing the degree requirements.
4. List of specific courses and curriculum requirements. The curriculum should lead to mastery of the area of knowledge described in the program description. Coursework should provide both breadth and depth in the area of knowledge being pursued.

Most Special Studies majors contain between 32 and 50 credits of requirements drawn from across university offerings.

5. A [Curriculum Map](#) showing the connection between the required courses and the Program Learning Objectives.
6. A curricular plan outlining the specific courses (both major and degree requirements) to be taken across 8 semesters.
7. Letters of support from two faculty sponsors.

Any tutorial work (496, 498 or 499) should be briefly described indicating the sponsor of the activity, the faculty person who is responsible for grading, and the process of evaluation for the tutorial work. Letters of support should be included from any external site sponsors (i.e., for internships or similar field placements). Independent study courses must be described and approved using the standard independent study form. Study abroad programs and courses should be specifically identified and described.

All major courses transferred to UB from other schools must be formally designated and identified. Transfer courses may comprise no more than 50% of the major curriculum.

All university degree requirements must be met, including (but not limited to):

- Minimum of 120 and maximum of 126 total credits
- Residency requirement of 30 credits
- At least 45 credit hours at the upper division (at least 300-level), including at least 24 credits within the Special Studies major.
- The number of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) credits varies by degree type. B.A. degrees require 90 LAS credits, B.S. degrees require 60 LAS credits, All UB Curriculum (general education) requirements completed. The Liberal Arts and Sciences comprise the disciplines of the humanities, natural sciences and mathematics, and social sciences.

### **What are the Next Steps?**

Once an area of study has been initially determined, students should identify two faculty sponsors who can assist with planning and support completion of the major. Faculty sponsors must have tenured/tenure-track positions and must have expertise in the chosen area of study. Adjunct and part-time faculty are not permitted. The student should present a rough draft of the Statement of Intent and Purpose to prospective sponsors for their review and guidance. The sponsors should assist the student in creating a curriculum that supports the major's programmatic theme and learning outcomes. It is important that the faculty sponsors provide their guidance and expertise in developing the special major proposal. The faculty sponsors must evaluate the quality and integrity of the proposal before it is submitted for committee review.

Students who need assistance in defining the goals of their Special Studies degree may need to consult first with the Special major academic advisor, with potential faculty sponsors, and with a Career Design counselor in order to clarify and focus their academic intentions and to understand the academic resources and challenges at their disposal.

After the proposal is completed, it should be submitted, including the faculty sponsor letters, to the Special Major advisor who will provide an initial review to ensure the proposal is complete. It is then submitted to the faculty review committee which consists of faculty drawn from different areas across the university, appointed by the Dean of Undergraduate

Education. The committee reviews each proposal to ensure that the major is academically sound and meets University standards.

The committee can recommend one of three possible actions to the Dean of Undergraduate Education: approval, provisional approval, or rejection.

- If **Approved**, the student's plan is changed to Special Studies (BA or BS, as approved).
- If the proposal is **Provisionally Approved**, the student must make the necessary adjustments and resubmit the revised proposal to the committee chair for review.
- If the proposal is **Rejected**, it requires substantial re-working and needs to be resubmitted for the committee's re-evaluation.

### **Other Things to Know:**

The special major may not duplicate any existing degree program in the university. Special majors cannot be used to propose academic concentrations similar to existing university programs with the intention of circumventing specific requirements.

Special majors cannot be proposed in areas where certification or licensure is required by state or professional boards of accreditation (e.g., nursing, engineering). Special majors may also not suggest that the student is acquiring professional competence as a therapist (programs titled Art Therapy, Psychotherapy, etc. are prohibited).

Any proposal submitted in the student's last semester must be accompanied by a petition explaining the late submission. The petition should include a letter of support from the faculty sponsor.

Changes to an approved special major must be approved by the faculty sponsors and the special major advisor. All approved changes to the proposal must be recorded and forwarded by Undergraduate Education to the Office of the Registrar.

If one of the faculty sponsors leaves the university with two or more semesters remaining for graduation, it is the responsibility of the student to find another sponsor. The new sponsor must submit a Faculty Sponsor Agreement form that becomes a part of the proposal. If one of the sponsors leaves the university with one semester remaining before graduation, the remaining sponsor may serve as sole sponsor of the approved program of study.

Students must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5, at the time of application. A minimum 2.00 GPA in both the major and the overall academic record is required for graduation.

Approval of a special major does not guarantee access to courses from departments that limit their enrollments to majors only. It is the student's responsibility to negotiate with the respective departments for those restricted courses which are integral to the proposed major concentration.

It is the student's responsibility to file an Application for Graduation by published deadlines in order to confer a degree in Special Studies.