

Evaluating Proposals for Individual Majors

The CIS and its Faculty Review Committees (FRCs) are guided by prevailing standards of scope and substance for a departmental or program major at St. Olaf, and by the following:

1. A student's proposed plan must meet CIS requirements for the quantity of academic experience constituting an individual major – generally the equivalent of 11-12 units of academic work, in addition to the spring semester unit devoted to the senior project.
2. A student's proposed plan must include evidence that it provides
 - a. concepts, content, methods, and skills appropriate to the proposed area of study;
 - b. opportunities for exploration and development of skills, sub-fields, and special topics; and
 - c. opportunities for significant advanced study, normally at least two Level III courses, culminating in an integrative senior project.
3. A student's plan must include consideration of one or more possibilities for a capstone project to be completed during the senior year. For the purposes of proposal review, these project ideas are hypothetical, and students are encouraged to include several possible options. The FRC may choose to advise the student about how well these projects would serve as an integrative capstone to the major, or to suggest alternatives.

A Faculty Review Committee may also consider the broader role of a major in the project of liberal education. A “good [undergraduate liberal arts] major”

1. develops a cognitive “home” from which to begin to interpret the rest of the world – a base of experiences and knowledge, fluency with a vocabulary, and methods of interpreting evidence, in relation to which unfamiliar subjects may become meaningful.
2. develops the capacity for recognizing and interpreting connections, or “for applying learning from one context to another.”
3. develops the capacity for analyzing evidence and arguments, and interpreting experiences.
4. develops an understanding of factors that condition knowledge, and of the origins and histories of ideas and methods in the subject area.
5. includes “reflexivity” – the opportunity to return to something learned in the past and to reexamine it in light of further learning.
6. includes learning in community, both by situating new knowledge in the context of the expertise of others, and by promoting the role of conversation in the learning process.
7. cultivates “the capacity for relating academic learning to the wider world, to public issues and personal experience.”
8. includes a culminating opportunity to synthesize a student's various experiences in the major.