

***Creating, Administering, and Eliminating  
Majors and Minors at Rice University  
[Approved by Senate Dec. 2010]***

**A. General Provisions**

1. The approval of an undergraduate major or minor by the Faculty Senate represents an endorsement by the whole faculty of the intellectual merit and academic rigor of a particular course of study. Further, the subsequent publication of the major or minor in the General Announcements implies an on-going, long-term, commitment by the administration of the university to the maintenance of the major or minor.
2. As such, those proposing a new undergraduate major or minor should expect an exceptionally high level of scrutiny and discussion before any such proposal is approved, and should endeavor to clearly demonstrate an appropriate administrative commitment to the continued staffing and resourcing of the major or minor. While proposers are at liberty to craft a proposal as they see fit, successful proposals will normally include all of the following:
  - a. A defense of the intellectual merit of the proposed undergraduate major or minor as a useful and appropriate focus of training, given the mission of the university as it has been expressed by the President and Board of Trustees. This defense should include (1) an explanation of the history and development of the subject area of the major or minor as an object of organized intellectual inquiry; and (2) a survey of how, if at all, the subject has been incorporated into the curriculum of Rice's peer institutions.
  - b. A defense of the unique intellectual contribution of the proposed undergraduate major or minor over and above existing programs.
  - c. Letters of support from the Provost (for majors) and all relevant Deans and Department Chairs (for majors and minors). In some cases, detailed below, a formal interdepartmental agreement, signed by the relevant Deans or other administrators, will be required. Even when such an agreement is not required, letters from relevant administrators should indicate that the resources needed to support the undergraduate major or minor are available and will be available on an on-going basis. For Departmental Chairs or Deans (as appropriate) these letters should indicate whether or not the relevant departmental faculties have formally endorsed the proposal, and the specific nature of any such endorsement (e.g., a majority vote).

- d. An indication of the number of current faculty at each academic rank who will regularly offer courses in the undergraduate major or minor, as well as any concrete plans for hiring of new faculty.
  - e. A demonstration that the curricular requirements for the proposed undergraduate major or minor meet all applicable rules specified in the General Announcements and cannot be "automatically" fulfilled by completion of some other existing major or minor. In other words, the same set of course requirements may not serve, in their entirety, to fulfill the requirements for another existing major or minor.
  - f. To comply with SACS accreditation requirements, as well as best practices in curriculum design, the proposal must include (1) a description of student learning outcomes that are clear standards for observable, measurable student-centered outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviors; (2) a curriculum map that relates the components of the proposed program to the specified student learning outcomes; and (3) an assessment plan for measuring the success and effectiveness of the program after implementation. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is charged with assisting proposers with the development of these elements. In addition, the proposal must include a letter from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness indicating whether SACS notification is required and, if so, the schedule for notification.
  - g. When appropriate, proposals should make a clear distinction between the set or sets (for different tracks) of courses that may be required of most students and that constitute the main substantive focus of the curriculum of the major or minor and other sets of courses that should be considered elective. Normally, the former group of course will either be required of all students in the major or minor (or in a specific track of the major or minor) or will be among one or more relatively short lists of courses from which students are required to choose. In contrast, elective courses will normally come from a broader set of substantive foci, will not be required, and will be chosen from relatively longer lists of courses.
- 3. In addition, no proposal for an undergraduate major or minor may be approved unless it includes the complete and specific language describing the official name of the major or minor and the exact requirements for students to complete the major or minor – *as they would appear in the General Announcements if the proposal were approved*.
  - 4. A proposal for a new major or minor should be submitted to the Speaker of the Faculty Senate. The proposal will then be evaluated by the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum (CUC), which will make a recommendation to the Faculty Senate. In all cases, the Faculty Senate will make the final decision.
  - 5. Either the Committee on Undergraduate Curriculum or the Faculty Senate may ask proposers to provide additional information not included in the proposal before acting on the proposal.

6. After the implementation of this policy, the only new undergraduate majors and minors that may be designated as such in the General Announcements are Departmental Majors, Departmental Minors, Interdisciplinary Majors, Interdisciplinary Minors, or “Independent Area majors.”
7. Majors will normally consist of at least ten 3 or 4 hour courses and minors will normally consist of at least six 3 or 4 hour courses. Exceptions to this norm should be explicitly noted and defended in the proposal.
8. In order to appear in the General Announcements for the immediately upcoming academic year, new undergraduate major or minors must be approved by the Faculty Senate before March 1. Undergraduate Majors or Minors that are approved after March 1 will normally not appear in the General Announcements until the following year. The proposal review process, involving evaluation by the CUC and voting by Faculty Senate, usually takes between two and six months. The university recognizes the need for constant innovation in the curriculum and, as such, gives wide latitude to the faculty within each academic department to define and adjust the specific curricular requirements of the majors and minors and inter-disciplinary majors and minors that they administer. This includes freedom to change course requirements and the substantive content of the curriculum within broad bounds. However, situations that constitute “substantial change” (as defined in *Section E* below) require prior approval of the Faculty Senate.

#### **B. Provisions specific to Departmental Majors**

1. A departmental major is a program of study that draws almost all of its upper level courses from a single academic department, is administered and monitored by that department, and is listed in the General Announcements in the section describing the department’s curricular offerings.
2. Departments may offer more than one departmental major.

#### **C. Provisions Specific to Departmental Minors**

1. A departmental minor is a program of study that draws almost all of its upper level courses from a single academic department that already offers a major in that program of study. It is administered and monitored by that department, and is listed in the General Announcements in the section describing the department’s curricular offerings. The intent of the departmental minor is to encourage, and give appropriate credit for, a coherent course of study in which students both master a core body of knowledge and obtain a broad overview of a subject outside their major focus of study. ***The following provisions apply to proposals for a new departmental minor whose name matches that of the corresponding departmental major (e.g., major, minor in Physics).***

2. In order to ensure intellectual cohesiveness, departmental minors will normally have three or four required courses and a few courses chosen from a larger list. Exceptions to this norm should be justified in the proposal.
3. ***Department chairs may propose a departmental minor with the approval of the relevant dean. Proposals to create a departmental minor should include a brief summary of the objectives of the minor, the requirements as they will appear in the General Announcements, and a list of required and elective courses. In addition, the proposal must include (1) a description of student learning outcomes; (2) a curriculum map that relates the components of the proposed program to the specified student learning outcomes; and (3) an assessment plan for measuring the success and effectiveness of the minor after implementation. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is charged with assisting proposers with the development of these elements.***
4. ***Proposals for Departmental Minors will receive expedited review by the CUC. ~~and approval by the CUC is sufficient for final approval. In the unlikely event that a proposal is not approved, it will be forwarded to the Senate with a recommendation to disapprove, but in this case the Senate will make the final decision.~~***

#### **D. Provisions Specific to Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors**

1. Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors are programs of study that draw a substantial part of their upper level course requirements from two or more different academic departments or divisions. The intent of the interdisciplinary majors and minors is to foster new ideas and creativity in the curriculum and to provide additional value to students over and above current offerings from departments or other programs.
2. Proposals concerning undergraduate majors or minors that consist primarily of courses offered by the Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Business will be considered under this section. In this case, references to academic departments in this section should be equated with appropriate academic units within the Jones school.
3. In addition to the general requirements detailed above, an Interdisciplinary major or minor must also satisfy the following constraints, each of which should be specifically addressed in the proposal:
  - a. Completion of the requirements of the interdisciplinary major or minor will not automatically fulfill the requirements of any other major or minor (as these are listed in the General Announcements for the academic year in which the proposal is made). This is a minimum standard. Successful proposals will normally demonstrate a substantially greater degree of distinction from any other major or minor.
  - b. The requirements of the Interdisciplinary major or minor must include elements that are unique to the program - that is, these requirements may not be a subset of the requirements for any other Rice major or minor - or a combination of such

programs (as these are listed in the General Announcements for the academic year in which the proposal is made).

4. Administration of Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors:

- a. All interdisciplinary majors and minors will have a faculty steering committee to oversee the curriculum for the major or minor, appoint major or minor advisor(s), and alert relevant administrators of any deficiencies in course offerings for the major or minor.
- b. The administrative office responsible for appointing and overseeing the faculty steering committee and ensuring the continued staffing and resources to support the major or minor depends on which departments offer core upper level courses in the major or minor. For purposes of this section, “core” courses are those that, in the view of the proposers, constitute the main substantive focus of the curriculum of the major or minor. There are three possible cases and proposers should clearly state (and if necessary defend) which case they think should apply to their proposed major or minor:

- I. *Case 1:* All the departments contributing core upper level courses to the major or minor are in the same academic division

- i. In this case, the Dean of the relevant division is responsible for the administration of the major or minor, including appointing the faculty steering committee, and fulfilling the ongoing commitment to resources and staffing implied by the major or minor (or in the absence of such commitment initiating the proposal for elimination of the major or minor).
- ii. Changes to the curriculum of an Interdisciplinary major or minor of this kind should not be made without appropriate consultation with all participating departments. The Dean, with the assistance of the faculty steering committee, is responsible for adjudicating any issues associated with such changes and for communicating them, as appropriate, to the Faculty Senate.
- iii. A statement indicating the division responsible for administering the major must appear in the description of the major or minor that appears in the GA.

- II. *Case 2:* Departments contributing core upper level courses to the major or minor come from different divisions, but a substantial majority of the core upper level courses come from departments in the same division.

- i. In this case, the requirements are the same as in Case 1 but the relevant Dean is the Dean of the dominant division.
- III. *Case 3: Departments contributing core upper level courses to the major or minor come from different divisions and a substantial majority of the core upper level courses do not come from departments in the same division.*
  - i. In this case, no proposal for an interdisciplinary major or minor can be approved without an “inter-divisional agreement” signed by all Deans from divisions that, in the judgment of the proposers, provide a substantial portion of the core upper level courses for the major or minor. The CUC or Faculty Senate may direct proposers to include divisions in, or exclude divisions from, this agreement.
  - ii. The “inter-divisional agreement” must provide a description of the distribution of administrative responsibility for the major or minor across divisions, including anticipated changes in the distribution of responsibilities over time. At a minimum, the agreement must commit each division to the continued support of the major or minor until such time as the program is formally eliminated through Senate action and must specify the distribution of responsibility for appointing the faculty steering committee.
  - iii. The “inter-divisional agreement” must be provided in the proposal and, upon approval, to the University Registrar, who will link to this agreement in the online version of the General Announcements. Subsequent changes to such agreements are subject to the same faculty oversight that applies to the relevant sections of the General Announcements.
  - iv. Changes to course requirements or curriculum for an Interdisciplinary major or minor should not be made without appropriate consultation with all participating departments. The Deans of the divisions included in the inter-divisional agreement, with the assistance of the faculty steering committee, are jointly responsible for adjudicating any issues associated with such changes and for communicating them, as appropriate, to the Faculty Senate.
  - v. A statement indicating exactly which divisions are responsible for jointly administering the major or minor must appear in the description of the major or minor that appears in the GA.

#### **E. Definition of “Substantial Changes” to Existing Majors or Minors**

1. Any change in the name of a major or minor as it appears in the General Announcements
2. The creation or elimination of a “track” or concentration, where a track constitutes a coherent program of study, within the major or minor, that is identified as such in the General Announcements by a listing of the specific curricular requirements associated with it (whether identified as a “track” or not and whether or not given a specific name) (See Guidelines for Creating a new Major Concentration)
3. Changes in major or minor requirements that may not involve creating or eliminating “tracks” and may not propose changing the name of the major or minor but that nonetheless involve a reorientation of the substantive focus of large parts of the required courses in the major or minor. When in doubt, departments should consult relevant administrators and the leadership of the Faculty Senate.

#### **F. Provisions for the Elimination of an Existing Major or Minor**

1. Proposals for the elimination of an existing major or minor should be submitted to the Speaker of the Faculty Senate in accordance with the usual rules for submitting motions to the Faculty Senate.

#### **G. Applicability and Scope of the Policy**

1. This policy shall apply to any and all proposals for the establishment of new undergraduate majors or minors - whether proposed prior to this policy or not - that have not already been approved previous to its adoption. No provision of this policy other those in section A.9, E, and F shall apply to any major or minor that appears in the most recent General Announcements published before the date of adoption of this policy.
2. This policy does not change existing rules pertaining to the definition, creation, and administration of “Area Majors” as they are described in the General Announcements published most recently before the adoption of this policy.

#### **H. Preamble to the General Announcements**

1. Upon approval of this policy, a statement will be added to the General Announcements stating “The contents of Rice’s curricular programs are the collective responsibility of the faculty acting through their representatives in the Faculty Senate. Specific guidelines for the creation, elimination, and modification of such programs are provided in Rice Policy XXX”