CONTRACT MAJOR

Contract Major Advisor: LAURA MCKEON

Students with the talent and energy for working independently and with the strong support of two primary faculty sponsors may undertake a Contract Major: a coherent study of an interdisciplinary subject not covered by a regularly offered major. Such a major must be in an area suitable to the talents of the faculty in residence and cannot consist of minor modifications to an existing major. A Contract Major also must conform to the structure and have the coherence of a departmental or program major—i.e., it must embody a disciplined cumulative study that moves from an elementary to an advanced level and culminates in a synthesis similar to a senior major course. Hence, a Contract Major usually consists of a program of existing courses, sometimes supplemented by courses of independent study and the senior course.

The process of constructing a proposal for a Contract Major is both interesting and demanding. As part of that process, students should consider carefully the advantage of working within existing majors or programs, taking note of the considerable intellectual pleasures involved in sharing similar educational experiences with other students working within the same field. Students might also consider whether their interests could be met by completing a regular major and coordinate program, or two majors, or simply by working outside a major field in courses of special interest. Because the Contract Major represents an exceptional opportunity provided for students whose interests cannot be met through existing departmental and interdepartmental majors and programs, it cannot be pursued in conjunction with another major.

Students who wish to explore or propose a Contract Major should consult with the Contract Major Advisor and with potential faculty sponsors as early as possible in the fall semester of the sophomore year, and then—during the sophomore year—follow these procedures:

1) The student must initiate discussion with at least two members of the faculty from differing departments who expect to be in residence during the student’s senior year and who are willing to endorse the Contract Major and undertake a central role in supervising its implementation, criticism, evaluation, and ultimate validation. Since in essence faculty sponsors substitute for the student’s major department, they are expected to play an important role in the Contract Major.

2) The student must develop, in conjunction with the faculty sponsors, a written proposal (forms and guidelines are available in the Dean’s Office) which should contain:

   a) a description of the proposed major area of study and an explanation of the reasons for proposing the Contract Major. A sound and persuasive rationale for the major is crucial for obtaining approval from the Committee on Educational Policy (C.E.P.).
   b) a list of all courses in the proposed major and an explanation for each course choice. A minimum of nine semester courses, one of which must be designated the senior major course (and taken during the senior year), must be completed for a Contract Major. Normal rules governing course grades and grade point average apply for entry into and continuation in a Contract Major.
   c) a list of other courses taken or anticipated to meet College distribution requirements, including grades received in courses already completed.
   d) a list of completed courses toward a backup major(s) in case the contract major is not approved.

3) No later than mid-November, the student must meet with the Contract Major Advisor to discuss and further develop the proposal. By March 15th, the student must submit the final proposal to the Contract Major Advisor. By this date, the two faculty sponsors must submit their endorsement forms to the Contract Major Advisor. If the student is essentially proposing to transform an existing coordinate program (e.g., Africana Studies, area studies programs, Public Health), into a Contract Major, the chair of that program should also submit to the Contract Major Advisor a statement attesting to the validity of the proposal.

4) The Contract Major Advisor then conveys the proposal, a copy of the student’s most recent academic progress report, the two faculty sponsors’ endorsement forms, and recommendations regarding the feasibility and substance of the proposal, for approval by the Committee on Educational Policy. The C.E.P., after consultation with departments and programs substantially affected by a proposal, will vote on each proposal individually and will notify students and sponsors before the spring registration deadline. In making its decisions, the C.E.P. considers the student’s academic record, the coherence and feasibility of the plan of study, and the degree of support expressed by the faculty sponsors and, if appropriate, program chair.

Subsequent changes in a Contract Major must be requested in writing by the student and approved by the two faculty sponsors as well as by the Contract Major Advisor. Before making changes in the courses originally proposed for the junior and senior years, the new courses need to be approved by the two faculty sponsors and the Contract Major Advisor. During the fall of both the junior and senior years, contract majors should be in touch with their two faculty sponsors and the Contract Major Advisor about their progress in the major and the courses they are taking even if there have not been changes. Where the Contract Major Advisor has determined that there has been substantial alteration of the original program, the Contract Major Advisor will forward the student’s written request along with the endorsements from their two faculty sponsors to the C.E.P. for reconsideration.

THE DEGREE WITH HONORS IN THE CONTRACT MAJOR

The route to the degree with honors in the Contract Major is a senior thesis which is either two semesters and a winter study or one-semester and a winter study to be determined in consultation with your faculty advisors. The Contract Major with honors shall comprise a minimum of eleven semester courses (two-semester thesis) or ten semester courses (one-semester thesis) plus one winter study focused specifically on the thesis work. One semester of independent study undertaken for the thesis may be allowed to fulfill the requirement for a senior major course. Application to enter the honors program is made prior to the time of spring registration in April of the junior year and is based on a solid record of work of honors caliber, normally defined as maintaining at least a B+ average in courses taken for the Contract Major.

Students who intend to write a thesis submit a proposal to their two faculty sponsors and the Contract Major Advisor at this time. Students who will be away during the spring semester of their junior year need to make arrangements to apply while they are off campus in the spring. Admission to honors depends on the assessment by the two faculty sponsors and the Contract Major Advisor of the qualifications of the student and the feasibility of the project. If a student is admitted to honors, the student shall determine three readers (at least one of whom shall be a faculty sponsor) in consultation with the Contract Major Advisor.

Honors Contract Majors shall submit a draft of the thesis to the three readers by the end of winter study of the senior year. The faculty readers shall determine prior to the start of spring semester of the senior year whether the student is to continue as an honors candidate. If not admitted to honors candidacy, the student may elect not to continue further independent study. If admitted to honors candidacy, the student shall submit the finished written thesis or mini-thesis to the three readers no later than the third Monday after spring break. After the thesis has been completed, the student publicly presents his or her work. The readers shall determine Highest Honors, Honors or no honors.

CMAJ 493(F) Senior Thesis: Contract Major
Contract Major senior thesis.
Class Format: independent study
Extra Info: this is part of a full-year thesis (493-494)
Distributional Requirements:
Division 2

Fall 2014
HON Section: 01 TBA Instructor: Laura McKeon

CMAJ 494(S) Senior Thesis: Contract Major
Contract Major senior thesis.
Class Format: independent study
Extra Info: this is part of a full-year thesis (493-494)
Distributional Requirements:
Division 2

Spring 2015
HON Section: 01 TBA Instructor: Laura McKeon

CMAJ 497(F) Independent Study: Contract Major
Contract Major independent study.
Class Format: independent study
Distributional Requirements:
Division 2

Fall 2014
IND Section: 01 TBA Instructor: Laura McKeon

CMAJ 498(S) Independent Study: Contract Major
Contract Major independent study.
Class Format: independent study
Distributional Requirements:
Division 2

Spring 2015
IND Section: 01 TBA Instructor: Laura McKeon