

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Individualized Major Program
Harpur College of Arts and Sciences
Binghamton University

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CONTENTS

Overview.....	2
General Requirements	3
Procedures	5
The Pitch and the Major Proposal.....	6
The Integrative Project.....	8
IMP Honors for Seniors.....	9
Forms	10

Please note: The policies and procedures detailed in this handbook are subject to change. Please consult with the IMP Coordinator if you are interested in pursuing an individualized major.

OVERVIEW

The **Individualized Major Program (IMP)** provides students in Harpur College with the opportunity to pursue their academic interests through innovative, interdisciplinary major programs of their own design. Under the guidance of faculty sponsors and the IMP Committee, students pursuing individualized majors draw multiple disciplines together into unique fields of study and undertake creative and original scholarly work.

Like any of the more traditional majors and programs in Harpur College, the IMP is firmly grounded in the liberal arts, which means that it primarily involves the framing and investigation of interesting questions. The IMP is not simply technical training, nor can it be composed of just any list of courses; this is not a program for students looking to graduate quickly with coursework they've already completed or for students looking to complete a pre-existing major without some of the courses it typically requires. Rather, the IMP requires that each student have a focused intent and outline a purposeful course of study that can be clearly articulated and justified. Students who pursue an individualized major must be highly motivated, curious, innovative, and self-directed.

The IMP is an intensive program. The traditional degree programs in Harpur College are perfectly able to address the great majority of student needs, and they provide exemplary preparation for a wide array of careers and other pursuits after graduation. But for those seeking a more individual path, the IMP allows them freedom to indulge their creativity, to explore their own questions in a scholarly way, and to craft programs of study uniquely suited to their interests.

Interested students should read carefully through each section of this handbook and then contact the Harpur Advising Office to schedule an appointment with the IMP Coordinator.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Any student in Harpur College, including those concurrently enrolled in another school at Binghamton, may propose an individualized major. Prospective students must have **at least a 3.3 GPA**, though exceptions may be granted under certain circumstances at the discretion of the IMP Committee.

Before it can be undertaken, each individualized major must be devised, proposed, defended, and approved by the IMP Committee. As this can be a lengthy process, involving multiple revisions of several written statements, **students are advised to apply for individualized majors as sophomores**—and certainly no later than the beginning of the first semester of their junior year. Students receiving New York State financial aid through either the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) or the Excelsior Scholarship should begin work as soon as possible in order to ensure that this process does not interfere with their aid.

Each individualized major is the unique creation of the student pursuing it, reflective of individual questions and personal goals. As such, each will necessarily involve different disciplines and courses, but all individualized majors must meet the following criteria:

- The major must be **academically sound**, meaning it must address topics of sophistication and significance, both for the individual pursuing the major and for the broader academic disciplines of which it partakes.
- The major must demonstrate both **breadth and depth**, meaning that its component courses must balance broad training in relevant fields with opportunities to delve into certain topics, culminating in the final project. The major should not be so broad as to be diffuse, nor should it be so specific as to possess the granular focus of a doctoral dissertation. The structure of more traditional majors in Harpur College can be instructive in this regard.
- The major must **cohere in a logical fashion**, meaning that it must provide a suitable theoretical and conceptual framework for its particular course of study. Beyond proposing interesting questions, the major must, through the selection of disciplines and courses, outline a sensible way of investigating those questions.
- The major must be **interdisciplinary**, meaning that it must draw its component courses from at least three, and typically no more than five, Harpur College disciplines.
- The major must be **necessary**, in that it cannot replicate another program already available at the university. An individualized major also may not be used to avoid certain requirements of existing programs (e.g. Chemistry without Organic Chemistry, English without Shakespeare). The IMP may be employed, however, to expand an existing minor program that lacks a related major (e.g. Religious Studies or Middle East and North African Studies) into an individualized major.

Further, an individualized major must be fundamentally **theoretical** in nature, as opposed to **applied**—that is, it must derive from broad, interpretive questions, rather than focus narrowly on the development of particular skills. These should be significant questions to which the prospective

student does not already possess the answer; indeed, they should be substantial enough to be grappled with through rigorous coursework and a final, integrative project.

The difference between an “applied” and a “theoretical” major can, in many cases, simply be a matter of different approaches to similar goals. A student proposing an “applied” major, for example, will typically have in mind a certain type of job or career and will select only those skill-based courses that apply directly to it. A student proposing a “theoretical” major may have similar work in mind, but will instead couch those skills in a broader field of study, in an interrogation of the historical, cultural, social, ethical, economic, creative, and/or scientific questions and contexts that inform it.

Finally, each individualized major must be overseen by a faculty sponsor, typically representing one of the disciplines that compose the major, who will provide guidance as the student completes their coursework and who will supervise the final integrative project. Students considering an individualized major are encouraged to seek out faculty members who share their research or creative interests early in the process. Department directories on the Binghamton University website, as well as the Schedule of Classes on BU Brain, can be helpful here.

PROCEDURES

The IMP process involves several steps, each of which must be taken before the major can be completed. An overview is provided here, and then each individual step is treated in greater detail in the sections below. This process requires a considerable investment of time, and so interested students are strongly encouraged to begin work during the sophomore year. Juniors and even some seniors may still apply but should note that it is not the responsibility of the IMP Committee to ensure that students meet particular graduation deadlines. All students interested in the IMP should schedule an appointment with an IMP Coordinator as soon as possible.

A student intent on creating an individualized major must first prepare a brief **pitch** describing the major and present it at a meeting of the IMP Committee, which is composed of several faculty members representing the different divisions of Harpur College. The Committee members will then ask questions of the pitch, offer suggestions and criticism, and then approve or deny it. If denied, a student may work with an IMP Coordinator to revise the pitch and present it again.

If accepted, the pitch must then be expanded into a **major proposal**, which addresses any questions posed by the IMP Committee, provides a more substantial justification for the major, and includes an annotated list of courses for the major. The proposal also requires the endorsement of a faculty sponsor who will see the individualized major through to its conclusion (see “Forms” below). The student again presents the proposal before the IMP Committee, where again it may be approved or denied. As before, a denied proposal may be revised. An accepted proposal formally becomes a student’s major and the list of approved courses appears on DegreeWorks. After this point, the student pursues it as any other major, completing courses and working with the faculty mentor and IMP Coordinator to make any adjustments.

Please note:

- Prior to the approval of the major proposal, the student is not considered to have declared the IMP as their major; until that time, courses taken toward a possible IMP major may not count as “degree applicable” for the purposes of certain New York State financial aid programs (i.e. TAP and the Excelsior Scholarship).
- Students enrolled in the IMP must earn at least a C- in each of the courses that compose their majors, and no IMP courses may be taken on a Pass/Fail basis.

The IMP culminates in a final **integrative project**, a proposal for which must be approved by the IMP Committee, typically in the semester before a student intends to graduate. Once accepted by the IMP Committee, the project is conducted as an independent study with the student’s faculty sponsor in the student’s final semester. If the student receives a satisfactory grade for independent study, and assuming they have completed all of their other major coursework, the IMP is complete.

THE PITCH AND THE MAJOR PROPOSAL

Before you can pursue an individualized major at Binghamton University, you must seek the approval of the IMP committee, first with a brief pitch of the intended major, and then with a longer proposal that elaborates upon the ideas in the pitch and includes an annotated list of courses.

Each of these documents should be highly polished, clearly and logically organized, and written for an interested, scholarly audience. Each will likely require several rounds of revisions and so a significant investment of time. It is strongly encouraged that you consult with an IMP coordinator when preparing your pitch and proposal.

The Pitch

The pitch is just that, a brief sketch—no more than two typed pages—of your proposed major that will introduce the IMP committee to your ideas. This pitch should accomplish five tasks:

1. Explain how you came to your chosen major, and provide it a title.
2. Identify the academic and theoretical questions that you would like to investigate through your proposed major, as well as your motivations for pursuing them. These ought to be questions of real substance that you will be able to pursue through a full course of study and, eventually, a final project.
3. Outline the academic disciplines and programs from which you will draw your courses—the disciplines that will help you to investigate your questions—and explain how they will fit together and what each contributes to the major. Remember that any individualized major must be *interdisciplinary*—meaning that, not only must it include at least three separate disciplines, but it must join those disciplines together into a cohesive whole.
4. Describe your methodology. As you address the previous point, explain how, academically and theoretically, you will investigate the questions you identified earlier. From which of your included disciplines will you draw your framework? Will you approach your questions with the perspective of a social scientist? A humanist? Will you combine different analytical approaches? Why is your methodology appropriate for your particular interests?
5. Explain why you cannot pursue your academic interests through the existing structure of majors and minors at Binghamton.

If the initial pitch is approved by the IMP committee, the student will then develop it into a full major proposal, which must again be presented to the committee.

The Major Proposal

The major proposal is primarily an expansion of the pitch that develops on the initial rationale for the project and incorporates any suggestions or addresses any concerns raised by the committee. As such, the proposal is longer than the pitch—three to five pages—and allows more space for examples and discussion of each of the fields that will compose the major.

The proposal requires two important elements that the pitch does not. First, the proposal must include an **annotated list of courses** that will compose the major. The list may include both courses already taken and those that you intend to take, and each course must be listed along with its description from the course catalog and a brief explanation for its inclusion in the major. The main text of the proposal may also reference individual courses. When composing this annotated list, please be aware of the following requirements:

- **General course requirement** – The IMP must be composed of between twelve and fifteen courses, chosen from at least three (but typically no more than five) disciplines. A course with any number of credits attached may be counted toward the IMP, but please note that a “full” course typically earns at least three credit hours. The IMP must comprise at least 48 credits.
- **Upper-level Course requirement** – At least six of the above courses must be upper-level (that is, 300-level or above).
- **Seminar requirement** – One of the upper-level courses counted toward the IMP must be a 400-level seminar-type course taken in one of the fields that compose the major.
- **Integrative Project requirement** – At least four, but no more than eight, credits must be reserved for an independent study that integrates the various aspects of the major. See the next section for more information on the integrative project.
- **Residency requirement** – At least seven of the courses, including at least six of the upper-level courses, counted toward the IMP must be taken in residence in Harpur College at Binghamton University. The remainder may be taken at other institutions, approval by the IMP Committee.
- **Unique course requirement** – In the event of a double-major or double-degree program, at least eight courses in the IMP must be taken in addition to those counted in fulfillment of another major or degree.
- **Liberal Arts requirement** – No more than three courses counted toward the IMP may come from professional schools (e.g. Watson, SOM, DSON, CCPA) or from non-liberal arts disciplines (e.g. HWS or OUT).

At the discretion of an IMP Coordinator, individual courses approved by the IMP Committee may be substituted with others, so long as you supply a reasonable written justification and the change will not affect the essential character of the IMP. More significant changes must be approved by the committee. Please include the “Course Substitution Form,” below, with any proposed substitutions.

Second, unlike the pitch, the major proposal requires the written support of a **faculty sponsor** (via the “Faculty Sponsorship and Endorsement Form,” included below). The sponsor’s role, should the major be approved, is to supervise it, to ensure its cohesion and rigor, to serve as a resource and a sounding board, and ultimately to oversee the integrative project. The sponsor must be a Binghamton faculty member; in most cases should come from one of the disciplines included in the major; and should have some familiarity with the topics or themes under study. The sponsor should also be willing to devote regular time throughout the process to mentorship, in whatever form best suits the project. Please refer to the “Faculty Sponsorship and Endorsement Form” below for more information.

As with the initial pitch, the major proposal is presented at a meeting of the IMP committee, where it will be either approved or denied. If approved, the student pursues the approved coursework and returns to the committee in the second-to-last semester to propose an integrative project.

THE INTEGRATIVE PROJECT

Once an individualized major has been approved and the bulk of the coursework completed, the last step of the IMP process is the Integrative Project, which you must complete under the guidance of your faculty sponsor, typically in your final semester before graduation. The project is *integrative*, because it must draw together the major themes of your major into something original and significant. It offers the chance for you to exhibit the sustained investigative work, the grappling with multiple disciplines and scholarly approaches, that characterize the IMP. This final project can take a wide variety of different forms, depending on what best suits your particular major—from data-driven research, to creative writing, to stage plays and films, to community-focused outreach programs. Whatever the form, all projects must include a reflective element, though which you will comment on the successes, failures, and challenges that arose during the course of your project.

The integrative project begins with a proposal, which you are strongly encouraged to develop in consultation with an IMP Coordinator and your faculty sponsor. This document must be highly polished, clearly and logically organized, and written for an interested, scholarly audience.

The heart of the integrative project proposal is a four-to-five page **prospectus**, or written statement of purpose, which outlines the project to be completed. This prospectus should do the following:

1. Briefly summarize the individualized major and restate the questions that have guided it. The membership of the IMP Committee may have changed since your major was approved, so this serves to remind the committee of what you set out to study.
2. Outline the project that you will undertake and how it relates to the questions that have driven the major. Remember that this project should be integrative, meaning that it should draw upon the different elements that compose your major and demonstrate how they may be used together.
3. Clearly explain *how* the project will be undertaken: describe the methodology that will be employed (including any theoretical frameworks, data collection techniques, human-subject research approvals, source materials, logistical considerations, etc.); establish a reasonable timeline for the project; and indicate what you will produce at the end.
4. Address the significance of the project, both for your own interests and goals and for a general scholarly audience.

The integrative project proposal must also include a **bibliography** of scholarly or creative works that will inform the project and a written **statement from your faculty sponsor** indicating their support for the project and their willingness to oversee it. This letter should be signed and sent directly to an IMP Coordinator, who will provide it to the IMP Committee.

As with the pitch and major proposal, you must present your integrative project proposal to the IMP Committee, typically in your second-to-last semester before graduation. If it is approved, in your final semester you will enroll in a four-credit independent study with your faculty sponsor and undertake the project; it will be considered to be complete if you earn a grade of at least C- in the independent study. If the proposal is not accepted, you may revise it in consultation with an IMP Coordinator and your faculty sponsor.

The integrative project may also be used to complete your individualized major with honors. For more information, please see the following section.

IMP HONORS FOR SENIORS

When proposing your integrative project, you may choose to complete your individualized major with honors. To be eligible, you must have earned Binghamton University GPA of at least 3.3, and you must have earned at least a 3.5 GPA in all courses taken for your individualized major.

The application for IMP Honors occurs in conjunction with the integrative project proposal. In addition to all of your components specified in the previous section, you must also include:

1. A discussion of how your project will be significantly more involved or require significantly more work than is typically required for an integrative project.
2. A list of two faculty members who, along with your faculty sponsor, will serve as advisors for the integrative project. These faculty members should be familiar with the topical areas involve in the project and, like your faculty sponsor, should help to oversee it.

Your faculty sponsor's written statement must also include their recommendation that you complete an honors project.

As with the standard integrative project, you must submit your proposal for IMP Honors no later than your second-to-last semester before graduation. If the proposal is accepted by the IMP Committee, you will register for a four-credit independent study with your faculty sponsor and undertake the project in your final semester. Before the end of that semester, you must defend your completed project before a three-person honors committee, which will be chaired by your faculty sponsor and include one faculty member of the IMP Committee and another faculty member of your choosing. The project will be considered to be complete if it is accepted by the honors committee and you earn a grade of at least C- in the independent study. Any proposals or projects that are not accepted by their respective committees may be revised and resubmitted.

FORMS

The following forms are required at different points during the IMP process. Please read the description for each below, and contact the IMP coordinator with any questions.

Pitch Cover Sheet (required)

This form must be completed and attached your initial pitch when it is submitted to the IMP committee.

Proposal Cover Sheet (required)

This form must be completed and attached, along with all other required materials, to your major proposal when it is submitted to the IMP committee.

Faculty Sponsorship Form (required)

This must be signed by your faculty sponsor and included with your major proposal when you submit it to the IMP committee. This constitutes the faculty member's endorsement of your proposed major and marks their commitment to oversee it through the final integrative project. If they have questions regarding their role and responsibilities, please refer them to the IMP coordinator.

Integrative Project Cover Sheet (required)

This form must be completed and attached, along with all other required materials, to your integrative project proposal when it is submitted to the IMP committee.

Course Substitution Form (as needed)

This form must be submitted if you would like to propose any changes to a major course list that has already been approved by the IMP committee. Please note that, while the IMP coordinator may be able to approve small changes and individual course substitutions that do not materially alter the major, more significant changes must be presented before the IMP committee.

PITCH COVER SHEET
Individualized Major Program
Harpur College of Arts and Science
Binghamton University

Name: _____
Last First MI

B#: _____ **Class Standing:** FR SOPH JR SR

Non-IMP Major(s), if any: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ **E-mail:** _____

Anticipated Graduation Semester: _____

Proposed Major Title: _____

Proposed Departments/Disciplines for Major (three to five):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Attached Materials:

_____ IMP Pitch (two pages, double-spaced)

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

MAJOR PROPOSAL COVER SHEET
Individualized Major Program
Harpur College of Arts and Science
Binghamton University

Name: _____
Last First MI

B#: _____ **Class Standing:** FR SOPH JR SR

Non-IMP Major(s), if any: _____

Phone: () _____ **E-mail:** _____

Anticipated Graduation Semester: _____

Proposed Major Title: _____

Proposed Departments/Disciplines for Major (three to five):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Attached Materials:

_____ Major Proposal (three to five pages, double-spaced)

_____ Annotated course list, including course descriptions and justifications

_____ Faculty Endorsement and Sponsorship Form, signed

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

FACULTY ENDORSEMENT AND SPONSORSHIP FORM
Individualized Major Program

Student's Name: _____

Proposed Major Title: _____

The Individualized Major Program (IMP) provides students in Harpur College with the opportunity to pursue their academic interests through innovative, interdisciplinary degree programs that are not presently available through established departments. Individualized majors must involve multiple departments, must be based in the liberal arts, and must be theoretical—meaning that each must be driven by interesting questions. Students interested in the program must first devise and present a brief “pitch” to the IMP committee, which, if approved, they must then expand into a larger proposal that includes a full list of courses. If that proposal is approved, the student is formally enrolled in the major and pursues it like any other. In the second-to-last semester, the student returns to the committee with a proposal for a final, integrative project for the final semester. Successful completion of the project, along with all required coursework, amounts to completion of the major.

It is at the proposal stage that students are required to seek out the support of a faculty sponsor. Because IMPs are by nature interdisciplinary and unique, students involved in the program lack to the support of a department. They require the guidance of a faculty member who can help to provide structure, offer a sounding board for their ideas, and ultimately oversee the final project. To be eligible to participate, faculty sponsors must be on a tenure track in Harpur College and must either represent one of the fields of study that compose a student’s proposed major or by some other means be familiar with the topic.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to serve as the faculty sponsor for the student and the project listed above. You are indicating that you have discussed the content and structure of the proposed major with the student and that you endorse it as a viable project. You are also agreeing that you will be regularly available to provide mentoring and support and that you will oversee the student’s final project.

If you would like to include a written statement of your support, please attach it to this form.

The IMP Committee wishes to thank you for the investment of your time and your expertise. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Alex Jablonski, the IMP Coordinator, at ajablons@binghamton.edu.

Sponsor's Name: _____

Sponsor's Department: _____

Sponsor's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

INTEGRATIVE PROJECT PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

Individualized Major Program

Harpur College of Arts and Science

Binghamton University

Name: _____
Last First MI

B#: _____ **Class Standing:** FR SOPH JR SR

Non-IMP Major(s), if any: _____

Phone: () _____ **E-mail:** _____

Anticipated Graduation Semester: _____

Individualized Major Title: _____

Departments/Disciplines Composing Major:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Proposed Project Title: _____

Attached Materials:

_____ Integrative Project Proposal (five to seven pages, double-spaced)

_____ Bibliography of foundational and theoretical sources to be consulted

_____ Signed letter of support from faculty sponsor

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

COURSE SUBSTITUTION FORM
Individualized Major Program

Name: _____
Last First MI

B#: _____ **E-mail:** _____

Individualized Major Title: _____

Use the table below to indicate the courses that you would like to change and their substitutions. Please include the department (e.g. HIST), course number, and an abbreviated title for each course. If you need more room, attach additional pages as needed.

Original Course (department, number, title)	Substitutions (department, number, title)

Attached Materials:

_____ Course descriptions and written justifications for each proposed substitution

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____