

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA ASHEVILLE

FACULTY SENATE

Senate Document Number SD5124S

Date of Senate Approval 04/04/2024

Statement of Faculty Senate Action:

APC Document 44 (IST):

**Proposal to Revise the IST-Individual Degree
Concentration requirements**

Effective Date: Fall 2024

1. Delete: On page 202, the entry under **Interdisciplinary Studies: Individual Degree Concentration:**

The Individual Degree Concentration offers students the opportunity to develop an individual degree program that integrates academic disciplines. It allows the academically strong, self-motivated student to design her or his own major with the help of faculty members from different departments. The program exists to help a student pursue an interdisciplinary major that is not offered at UNCA while making use of existing university resources.

An individual degree concentration requires the student to assemble a committee consisting of at least two faculty members from two different departments who will help design a course of study. At least one member must be a tenured member of the faculty. The student and faculty will design a rationale for the proposed program of study, indicating how this particular program will meet the educational goals of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program, and how the program differs from existing programs at UNCA.

Students should meet with the IST director to pick up complete application guidelines and for guidance in creating a successful proposal. Proposals must be submitted and approved before a student completes 75 hours. Deadlines for submission of proposals are set each semester, normally occurring midway through the semester.

Add: On page 202, in place of deleted entry:

The Individual Degree Concentration allows students to develop an individualized degree program that integrates academic disciplines. It includes courses from two or more disciplines with a central focus on a subject or topic that may not be covered in existing majors or combinations of academic programs, but the combination of these courses will help students reach their academic/career goals. A Plan of Study will be devised in consultation with a faculty advisor and approved by the Interdisciplinary Studies department chair.

2. **Delete:** On pages 202-203, the entry for the **Individual Degree Concentration:**

Requirements for an Individual Degree Concentration:

1. There must be a persuasive rationale for the individual program

This must include an explanation of the need for an individual concentration. A persuasive rationale must also include the reasoning behind the focus of the proposal and what the course of study is intended to accomplish. It is important this is not simply a listing of courses, but a real course of study that is academically sound and intellectually defensible. The following types of proposals *are not* appropriate for an Individual Degree Concentration:

- Proposals for majors that the university does not have the resources to provide.
- Proposals that are based on the specific requirements of a professional program or are narrowly tailored for a specific career.
- Proposals that modify or substantially reproduce an existing degree program.
- Proposals that combine existing majors with an existing minor.

2. A specific statement of the learning objectives of the proposed Individual Degree Concentration and how the learning objectives of the IST program are met

This statement should include references to course work as well as to individual work. A proposal that relies heavily on special topics or research with one professor is unlikely to be approved. The learning objectives of the IST program are included in the application packet available from the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies.

3. A specific statement of how the objectives will be assessed

The IST program requires all Individual Degree Concentration majors to develop a portfolio to be used in assessing program learning objectives. Summary statements from faculty committee members are required at least once a year indicating progress towards and achievement of concentration goals.

4. Description of capstone project or coursework

The capstone experience should synthesize and summarize the major, and demonstrate major competency.

5. Listing of courses required for the major

A specific list of required courses must be submitted and placed into appropriate subcategories.

- The major must total 36-45 credit hours.
- Courses must be from at least three different disciplines available at UNC Asheville.
- No more than one-half of the required credit hours may come from any one department.
- At least 21 of the required hours must be at the 300-level or above.
- Students must have completed or be enrolled in IST 290 to apply for an individual concentration.
- IST 495 must be included in the list.
- At least two-thirds of the major must be taken while a student at UNC Asheville.
- Students seeking an Individual Degree Concentration cannot seek a double major.
- None of the hours used to fulfill requirements for a declared minor may be used for the Individual Degree Concentration.

6. Timetable for completion of degree

The timetable should be based on reasonable expectations of course offerings and should demonstrate that the degree can be completed in a reasonable amount of time.

It may be necessary to consult with department chairs about recent patterns of course offerings. Individual Degree Concentrations often take more than four years simply because of course scheduling. Curricular substitutions can be made after degree approval, but are not always appropriate or possible. Students who are not enrolled for two consecutive semesters must have their Individual Degree Concentration reviewed when they return. Students who are not enrolled for three or more consecutive semesters must reapply for an Individual Degree Concentration.

7. Statement of Faculty Support

Each faculty member on the student's committee should write a statement of feasibility and support of the concentration and its objectives. It is expected that faculty will work with the student to develop all parts of the proposal, but a separate statement of support is required. Faculty members agree to fulfill the function of an academic department for the student, which includes not only establishing and assessing learning objectives, but also supervising the student's capstone experience. Faculty who are unsure of the requirements should contact the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies.

When the IST director determines the submitted proposal is consistent with the university's mission, the student can formally declare a major in Interdisciplinary Studies. This declaration is contingent on the Office of the Registrar certification that the proposal meets all graduation requirements. No changes may be made in the approved program without written authorization from the IST director. The title of the individual degree will be identified on the student's transcript at the time of graduation.

Add: On pages 202-203, in place of deleted entry:

Students interested in the Individual Degree Concentration must submit an individualized degree plan of study form to the Interdisciplinary Studies department chair. This form, available on the department's website, must include a brief explanation (approximately 100-200 words) of what subject areas will be combined and why. It will also include the listing of proposed courses, some initial ideas or questions to be answered in the senior capstone and potential titles for the Individual Degree Concentration.

After the individualized degree plan of study is approved, it is forwarded to the Office of the Registrar for verification that the proposal meets all graduation and proposal requirements, after which the student can formally declare a major in Interdisciplinary Studies. No changes may be made to the approved program without written authorization from the Interdisciplinary Studies chair. The title of the individual degree will be identified on the student's transcript at the time of graduation.

Requirements for an Individual Degree Concentration:

- I. Required courses in the major—36 hours, including: IST 499; 16 hours in a primary subject area, as defined by course prefix; 8 credits in a secondary subject area; 8 additional hours of electives relevant to the program of study and approved by the major advisor. These 8 additional hours cannot be in the primary or secondary area of study. Of the 36 required hours, 16 must be at the 300-400 level.
- II. Required courses outside the major—None.
- III. Other departmental requirements—Major competency is demonstrated by successful completion of IST 499.

Students seeking an Individual Degree Concentration cannot seek a double major, and none of the hours used to fulfill requirements for a declared minor may be used for the Individual Degree Concentration. UNC Asheville graduates returning for a second degree cannot use any of the courses from their previous major or minor for the Individual Degree Concentration.

Impact:

This will simplify the process for students to declare the major and also significantly reduce the amount of time they spend on preparing the application to declare the major. Faculty work load will also reduce as they will not have to complete exhaustive paperwork but can work directly with advising the students.

Although the current requirements don't specify what course students should take to satisfy the competency requirement, most students completing the Individual Degree Concentration register for an independent study of IST 499 for the capstone project, with their faculty advisor serving as instructor. We don't anticipate a change to this practice, so specifically requiring IST 499 should have no impact on faculty resources or workload.

These proposed changes are poised to significantly impact achieving our institutional imperatives, fostering enrollment growth, and enhancing degree efficiency. Notably, our state appropriations will be influenced by how effectively we meet specific metrics crucial to the viability of our institution. These metrics include:

1. Four-year, first-time student graduation rate from anywhere
2. Undergraduate degree efficiency (degrees per FTE)
3. First-time student indebtedness at graduation
4. Transfer student indebtedness at graduation
5. Education and related spending per degree

Rationale: Eliminating curriculum barriers, thereby increasing access, is essential to aligning with our key performance indicators. Additionally, improving curricular options and streamlining graduation requirements will help us achieve greater degree efficiency.

This revision will also serve the following purposes:

- To simplify the pre-declaration steps/proposal process for the Individual Degree Concentration. The current approval process is laborious for both the advisors and the students, which makes the program prohibitive for interested students.
- To reduce the criteria so that it's more approachable for returning students or new transfers.
- To provide a pathway for adult learners returning after having some college but no degree or students with a high amount of transfer credit that's not focused in any one discipline.