

General Template for Adjunct Major

Rationale: Currently, much interdisciplinary education at Middlebury College operates on the assumption that a student who takes many courses on a common theme from different disciplinary perspectives will, with modest efforts, intuit meaningful interdisciplinary connections. However, this runs contrary to most scholarly opinions of interdisciplinary research: connections between different disciplines are usually far harder to establish, owing to the challenges of negotiating different methodological and theoretical perspectives that distinguish different disciplines.

Currently, the College offers three kinds of majors that are amenable to interdisciplinary education: double-majors, joint majors, and majors housed in interdisciplinary programs (American Studies, Environmental Studies, International Politics and Economics, International Studies, Neuroscience, Women's and Gender Studies)¹. The first of these makes no pretense of trying to cultivate student understanding of meaningful interdisciplinary connections. The second and third of these are frequently criticized for failing to ground students adequately in any single discipline, such that any interdisciplinary insights are frequently compromised by the lack of methodological rigor that such students would have been more likely to achieve by majoring in a traditional discipline².

To remedy this situation, we propose a different kind of structure for majors—hereafter called the *adjunct major*. Adjunct majors serve as complements (rather than alternatives) to existing majors. Unlike double-majors, adjunct majors are designed precisely to cultivate interested students' interdisciplinary sensibilities. Unlike joint majors and current interdisciplinary majors, they require majoring in a traditional discipline.

One such example is the Social Inquiry and Analysis Major (see attached documents), which is designed to cultivate interdisciplinary sensibilities among interested Social Science majors. However, in principle, there could be one or more adjunct majors for nearly every division (e.g. Humanities, Languages, Literature, Natural Sciences, Arts), as well as adjunct majors between divisions (e.g. there could be a Science and Technology Studies Major that spans the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences.) Such initiatives will require extensive collaboration and deliberation among faculty who would be stakeholders in such adjunct majors.

The adjunct major might also be a more fruitful paradigm for certain interdisciplinary programs currently at the College. While we do not propose to mandate this of any program, we certainly invite these programs to consider the costs and benefits of introducing an adjunct major.

Description:

¹ For simplicity's sake, I bracket from consideration various interdisciplinary minors.

² I do not suggest that this is always the case; only that it is a frequent complaint from faculty in traditional disciplines. However, insofar as these faculty members are best positioned to assess interdisciplinary majors' work in their classes, this complaint strikes me as a legitimate pedagogical concern.

Adjunct majors operate on the assumptions that:

- (1) A major's level of proficiency in at least one traditional discipline, and competence in another discipline core ideas, is necessary for meaningful learning between those two disciplines.
- (2) The question, "What is a meaningful interdisciplinary connection in this context?" is a fundamental (and difficult) problem to resolve in interdisciplinary research and education, and should be an explicit topic of study and reflection in undergraduate interdisciplinary education.
- (3) Interdisciplinary education involves careful mediation and understanding between the abstract (theoretical, methodological) and at the concrete (particular, empirical).

To that end, the adjunct major has four distinctive components:

- (1) Home Discipline: A major from a list of relevant traditional disciplines. Consequently, all adjunct majors are double majors, but not vice versa.
- (2) Cluster: Two to three "core" courses in discipline other than the student's Home Discipline.
- (3) Theoretical Core: Approximately four courses focused on identifying the kinds of meaningful connections that exist between the relevant disciplines.
- (4) Focused Sequence: Approximately four courses that are all directed toward a common theme (e.g. poverty, justice, crime, law, improvisation, etc.), and must be approved by the end of sophomore year in consultation with a faculty advisor and with the approval of the relevant Adjunct Program Chair. The Focused Sequence is subject to the following constraints:
 - a. All courses in this Sequence must be above the 0100 level.
 - b. One course should be either:
 - i. A 0400+ level in the student's Home Discipline; or
 - ii. 0700 in the Adjunct MajorThis should be thought of as the culmination of the student's academic experience within the Adjunct major, with the other courses in the Focused Sequence geared towards making the student capable of offering a beneficial multi-disciplinary perspective to the 0400 level seminar.
 - c. The Focused Sequence must include, but is not restricted to, courses from the student's Cluster and Home Discipline.
 - d. Any course taken in the Home Discipline that is part of the student's Focused Sequence counts towards both majors.

The exact details of these four components will require faculty input, and will depend on the pedagogical goals of the adjunct major in question.