



Guide to Writing Your IVSP Proposal

You are creating a unique, individualized major and learning plan and presenting it to the IVSP Faculty Review Board for their approval. Your proposal should demonstrate to the Faculty Review Board that the major you are proposing is legitimate and worthy of a place at the University. The Faculty Review Board's goal is to approve majors that enable students to graduate successfully with a cohesive degree that makes sense for the student. The following is an outline of the parts (identified by headers) of a typical IVSP proposal, along with writing prompts and tips for each. The writing prompts are meant only to guide your thinking—they are not to be used verbatim in your proposals.

1. **Introduction and Statement of Purpose** (suggested length, 1 page)

- Begin your proposal with a broad description of the needs or issues that your individual major prepares you to address. Explain why your proposed major is important and worthy of study. What questions do you want to be able to answer?
- Briefly justify why you cannot acquire the knowledge and skills you need through existing UMD majors, minors, or combinations thereof.
- Do research to see if a major like the one you are proposing is offered at another university. The existence of such a program could greatly strengthen the legitimacy of your proposal. Further, the content and emphasis in existing programs could be useful in creating part two of your proposal, "[Your Major] Defined and Explanation of Its Concentrations." Demonstrating similarities between the structure and course offerings of your proposed major and those of existing programs elsewhere would provide additional support.
- You may also provide background information on significant personal, professional, and/or academic experiences that are relevant to your major (prior coursework, research, community service, or employment, etc.). What in your past experiences suggests that your proposed major is a good fit for you? What evidence can you provide that it will sustain your interest and commitment?

2. **[Your Major] Defined including the Explanation of Its Concentrations** (suggested length, 1-1 ½ pages)

- Begin with a paragraph-long, well-crafted definition of your major that includes a description of your field of study as a whole, framed around the components of your concentrations and showing how they tie together. Your definition should be modeled after the definitions that academic departments create for their majors. For examples, please refer to Appendix: "Sample Major Definitions and Learning Objectives".
- After you have defined your major, identify your concentrations (themes or disciplines). Students typically identify three. These concentrations serve as the lenses through which you will study your major's central topic. You should provide a brief description of each: What does each concentration contribute to your major? Why is each perspective crucial to your major? How do the concentrations interconnect and strengthen each other? *Remember: a given course should fit transparently into a single concentration and not the others. This is a useful test to prevent overlap of your concentrations.*
- Please note: This section is not about what you need to learn in order to obtain or succeed in a job. It is about the concepts and principles you must understand in order to address the proposed area of inquiry.

3. **Learning Objectives and Future Goals** (suggested length, 1-1½ pages)

- Create your principal learning objectives. Clearly state the essential knowledge and skills you will acquire and apply in your proposed major. Academic departments often list *learning outcomes* for their major under the department's "Undergraduate" online tab. You might use these as a catalyst to think about your own. (Please refer to Appendix: "Sample Major Definitions and Learning Objectives.") We expect 4-5 learning objectives, including at least one per concentration. Consider the following when constructing your objectives:
 - What are the essential concepts, theories, methods, etc. you want to learn and be able to demonstrate?
 - What specific skills do you want to acquire and practice? (see Appendix B)
- Include any internships, research projects, work in campus labs, or study abroad programs you will also use in addition to your coursework to fulfill your learning goals.
- Finally, discuss your (possible) plans, career trajectories, and/or goals after graduation. Make sure your major specifically prepares you for your next steps.
- Please note: Each component of this part of your proposal—learnings goals, co-curricular experiences, and future plans—should fit into an integrated vision of your individually created, interdisciplinary major.

• **Capstone** (suggested length, 1-1 ½ pages)

Please be as detailed with this section as possible. Your capstone is a substantial piece of work that represents the culmination of your major and gives you the opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned in this major. Do background research online so that you are familiar with the terms, definitions, and principal concepts that are characteristic of your field. This will help you describe your capstone more concretely and robustly.

Capstone projects have often taken one of three forms: a research paper that summarizes the outcomes of a study; a systematic literature review of a relevant topic, culminating in recommendations for subsequent research or possible actions; or a creative project, performance, or community service project. Other forms are also possible.

The three common forms for capstone projects:

- **Research study or report:** Please start by introducing and articulating your research question(s). Provide evidence that your topic is worthy of investigation. Explain the feasibility of your research and the contribution(s) you expect to be able to make. Identify specific sources of information you will use (e.g., databases, government and non-profit publications, oral histories, published books). Discuss the methodology you will employ to address your research question(s). Explain how your research study and report will realize and demonstrates your learning objectives. Describe what the final product will look like (the deliverables).
- **Systematic literature review:** This type of literature review summarizes and critically analyzes the research under review. It can provide a synthesis of the current state of knowledge, offer new insights into the research question, identify gaps in the literature, and/or suggest new directions for future research. It typically begins with a clear, well-formulated question or questions; identifies the relevant literature for the review; and includes a set of criteria and timeframe parameters for inclusion and exclusion in the review. Identify the specific sources of information you will be using (e.g., databases, government and non-profit publications, oral histories, published books). Careful assessment of the quality of the research under review is essential in every case. To ensure that your systematic review is feasible, you should conduct preliminary research to confirm that there is a sufficient amount of quality resources currently available to use for your project. Indicate the primary result or

combination of results you hope to achieve. State how you plan to present your findings (e.g. in charts, spreadsheets). Finally, explain how your systematic literature review will realize and demonstrate your learning objectives

- **Creative works, products, performances, community service initiatives, etc.:** Describe what you will do, and explain *how* you will do it. Will your created project also be supported by a literature review or research paper? What tools and methodologies will you use and why? Is the project feasible? What is the timeline for project completion? Describe the final form for your project: What will it look like? What are the parts? How will your project be evaluated- under what and whose criteria? How does the project meet your learning objectives? In what ways does the project represent a culmination of your major? When you choose to complete such a project, you will still write a significant reflection on and analysis of your experience.

Appendix: Sample Major Definitions and Learning Objectives

Departments granting undergraduate majors at the University of Maryland and other universities define those majors clearly and succinctly, and they support their definitions with a set of learning objectives that articulate what students within their majors will learn and be able to do. IVSP students must do this for themselves.

Consider these examples:

Disability Studies is a multi-disciplinary field that investigates, critiques, and enhances Western society's understandings of disability. The Minor and Major will introduce you to a critical framework for recognizing how people with disabilities have experienced disadvantages and exclusion because of personal and societal responses to impairment, and for exploring how disability activists and scholars have re-conceptualized disability from a more empowering social-political and human rights perspective as an element of human diversity and a source of community.

Central Learning Goals:

- Understand the disability studies framework and articulate the concept of disability as a social construction.
- Identify the major political, social, cultural, economic, and scientific ideas, practices, and legacies that shape the meanings of disability.
- Apply a critical lens to representations of disabled people.
- Examine historical and emerging policy and law focused on disability.
- Describe the legal treatment of disabled people including the development of the civil rights movement for disabled people and the major international human rights instruments.
- Develop skills in critical thinking about diversity and how disability intersects with other categories such as race, gender, sex, and class.

Source: Website of University of Washington College of Arts & Sciences (April 2019)

The **Kinesiology** major provides a well-rounded, scholarly understanding of human movement and physical activity. The major addresses historical, cultural, developmental and biophysical bases for participation in movement activities for people of all ages. Students gain an understanding of how human movement works, the factors that directly influence movement and the benefits of an active, movement-oriented lifestyle.

At the completion of the B.S. degree in Kinesiology, students should demonstrate the following outcomes:

- Students will interpret, synthesize, and critically analyze research underlying the kinesiological dimensions of physical activity and health.
- Students will develop principled reasoning skills necessary to apply and extend kinesiology knowledge to address problems that are relevant to physical activity and the health of diverse populations.
- Students will integrate, interrogate, and communicate the connection between the scholarship of kinesiology and the goals of public health.
- Students will engage in a diversity of physical activities both within and outside their formal curriculum.
- Students will integrate their physical activity experiences with kinesiology sub-disciplinary knowledge.

Source: Website of University of Maryland School of Public Health (April 2019)

The **Government and Politics** major combines philosophical and scientific concerns in its overall program as well as in specific courses. It emphasizes such broad areas as political development, policy analysis, social justice, political economy, conflict, and human rights. These broad conceptual areas are integral components of study in the discipline.

The GVPT curriculum is designed to help students:

- Develop an understanding of basic political science concepts including power, institutions, political systems, theories of the state, political conflict, citizenship, and contending analytical and theoretical approaches.
- Develop proficiency in research and analytical skills.
- Develop a basic knowledge of the methods, approaches, or theories used in accumulating and interpreting information applicable to the discipline of political science.
- Develop effective oral and written communication skills to clearly and coherently present information in the discipline of political science.

Source: Website of University of Maryland College of Behavioral and Social Sciences (April 2019)