

Assessment Report 2008 for the International Studies Major

Educational Goals and Objectives

The International Studies Major had 436 declared students in the 2007-08 academic year, making it one of the College of Letters and Science's largest undergraduate majors. In our mission to educate globally competent students, the International Studies Major is central to the University's strategic mandate.

The International Studies Major provides students with a tableaux of courses on global political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues within which students may combine a broad liberal arts education with a specialization in one of four options: global security, global environment, global political economy and policy, and global cultures. Historically, students have supplemented these specialized options with study of a particular region and languages. One of the Major's strengths is that it allows students to integrate comprehensive knowledge and specialized training.

The Major builds a foundation for students to pursue a variety of post-graduation pursuits, including graduate training, professional schools, employment in the international business world, and service or work for globally oriented organizations in the private, non-profit, governmental, and non-governmental sectors.

With the end of the Cold War, as tensions between East and West faded and as global flows of people, culture, technology, and capital accelerated, scholars and policymakers soon understood that the world as more than a series of discrete interactions and relations between states. Rather, globalization presented a new wrinkle in our understanding of security and insecurity, the environment, economies, transfers of capital and technology, health, development, human rights, the movement of people, and the spread of ideas and images. Across many campuses in the United States (and Europe), International Studies programs emerged to allow students to work with varied literatures and research on globalization and to provide them with practical training in languages and encourage applied learning through study abroad and internship programs.

At its most fundamental level, the International Studies Major seeks to expose students to the opportunities and challenges posed by globalization and to explore its impact at home, here in Wisconsin and in the United States. It does so in two ways:

The first is interdisciplinarity. Students majoring in International Studies take courses from diverse disciplines such as political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, agriculture and applied economics, history, business, geography, art, languages, and journalism/communications, and regional studies. The list of departments offering courses that fulfill requirements in the major is extensive and crosses colleges. The majority of our students take double majors in another discipline (often in one of those listed above). Our gateway course, IS301 (Introduction to International Studies) is team-taught, usually by faculty representing different departments and disciplines from social studies and humanities.

The second is a focus on building skills required to be competitive in the global, professional workforce. To provide students with a competitive edge, we encourage our majors to combine interdisciplinary studies with regional studies (e.g., Middle East, African, East Asian, South Asian, etc.). The University of Wisconsin-Madison has nine highly reputed, federally funded area-specific national

resource centers (the most of any campus in the country). The university remains a leader in language training for both mainline (e.g., French, German, Spanish) and less commonly taught languages (e.g., Hindi, Twi, Thai). While this area emphasis is still important to our students, we have seen in recent year many students opting for an alternate route: building skills in the sciences (e.g., health-oriented areas or environmental studies), business (e.g., the international business certificate), or economics. A strength of the major—in many ways because of its interdisciplinary—is its flexibility. Students may tailor their students to suits their intellectual interests and professional goals.

The Major's learning outcomes are:

- an ability to think analytically and critically
- the capacity to write effectively, clearly, and persuasively
- an ability to identify and evaluate the quality of information sources that may be applied to discussions of issue or problem-solving
- knowledge of research and methods used in the social sciences and humanities
- foreign language skills to achieve a level of basic communication and to learn about other cultures
- the development of cross-cultural competence through study abroad, internship, or other internationally focused opportunities
- engagement in global/international issues and involvement in ethical action

Nearly half of our students go abroad on study, work, or volunteer programs, and we have seen an increase in recent years of students interning with governmental and non-governmental groups. (After two years, our Washington, D.C., internship program is fairly robust.) A 2003 alumni survey indicates that graduates of the International Studies Major pursued: 1. immediate post-graduation employment, often in businesses or the non-profit sector; 2. post-graduate education, often law or business, and terminal M.A. programs in international studies, international policy, or political science; 3. doctoral programs (by far the smallest category).

Previous Assessment Activities

The International Studies Major is like no other major or unit on campus. It is not a department but a stand-alone major within the College of Letters and Science. It also is a unit within the Division of International Studies.

Organizationally, the Major has one one-half time faculty member, a 25 percent faculty director, a full-time advisor, and has a half-time administrative staff member. (This position has been vacant since August 2007 and has been filled with a Limited Term Employee.) We also have an executive committee comprised of social science and humanities faculty from the College of Letters and Science and the College of Agriculture. Our advisor, who, for all intents and purposes, is the face of the Major, works each year with 800 plus students: declared majors, prospective majors, and students seeking various certificates through our office.

Because of our uniqueness, it is important to note a couple of issues. First, the International Studies Major remains almost entirely dependent on resources and curricular decisions made in other departments. Therefore, we stress that our assessment plans do not address the quality of other departments, but rather the coherence and structure of the Major. Second, as noted in the 2006 assessment report, we continue to stress periodic, rather than annual activities. Because we have few

resources and fewer staff to conduct large-scale activities, we limit ourselves to periodic assessment, on the order of once every three to four years.

The Major's first director, Michael Barnett, carried out three sets of assessment activities between 1998-2000: an external review; student surveys; and alumni surveys. In response to student surveys, the International Studies Major was created in 2001 to encompass more globally oriented issues and themes such as global security, political economy, the environment, and culture. (International Relations, the study of inter-state interactions, remains housed in political science.) The formation of the International Studies Major, separate from International Relations, was made possible in part by a growing interest and expertise in globalization by faculty, who would open their courses to our students, in departments campus-wide.

Second, in response to student concern over coherence in the Major, an International Studies core course was developed (IS 301, Introduction to International Studies) to give a comprehensive overview of international studies topics and issues from interdisciplinary perspectives. One unforeseen problem is the popularity of the course. During the 2003-05 period, several majors complained that they were unable to enroll in the course because of demand. As a "gateway" course, a class designed to provide our students with the intellectual groundwork of international studies, it is often inaccessible to our students until their junior and sometimes senior year when they have nearly completed all requirements for the major. (The issue of course accessibility will be addressed again later.) In cases where students are closed out of the course, they have been allowed to substitute other courses so as not to delay their graduation. To address the issue of course accessibility and to satisfy student demand, the course, starting in spring 2005, was offered as a large lecture format with several teaching assistants. It has remained a large lecture course, with 250-300 students each fall.

Third, as suggested by the external review, the Major's first director successfully negotiated with the College of Letters and Science and the Division of International Studies to recruit and hire a faculty member to help stabilize course offerings, which was a consistent complaint noted in the student survey. The Major now has one one-half time faculty member, who is the regular lead instructor for IS301. However, we are now at serious risk of losing that faculty member to another university.

Future Assessment Plans

The International Studies Major is a tenuously coherent major. The Major for some years has experienced great organizational flux, which has hindered curriculum planning and assessment. Our first director departed (to another university) in 2004; the major had an interim director from 2004-05 and a second director from 2005-06. The most recent director has served since January 2007. Our long-time academic advisor retired July 2008 and has been replaced a smart and energetic, but relatively inexperienced, advisor.

Academically, the departure of faculty who teach courses relevant to our majors and the very real potential departure of our single half-time faculty member has meant that our majors have fewer courses from which to select. Access to IS301 continues to be a source of frustration to students, the faculty who teach it, and the advisor who must find alternatives for students. (If our one faculty member leaves the University, we will have no one assigned/dedicated by appointment to teach this introductory course.) Each option in the Major has a 600-level capstone course associated with it. Though not required, these courses should provide our majors with an integrative learning experience.

Yet, because the Major has no faculty, save for our one one-half time member, and limited resources to hire lecturers, these courses are taught sporadically at best.

In the past year, we have begun to reassess the Major's academic goals. Its requirements have not been revised since its inception as a new major in 2001. As part of our evaluation of the Major, the executive committee has requested approval from the College of Letters and Science's curriculum committee to revise some requirements of the Major. These changes will improve service to students, streamline business and advising processes, and to reflect current realities in course contact hours available to our majors. The specifics of our request are attached to this report.

Planned Assessment Activities: Working with a sub-committee of our executive committee, the director has identified several areas that need short- and long-term assessment.

Over the next year, we will evaluate:

- The value and purpose of IS301 as a gateway course. The sub-committee has begun to study the feasibility of making IS301 into a 100-level course, expanding its enrollment so that first- and second-year students will have improved access.

We know anecdotally that many of the students who take IS301 as juniors and seniors feel the course is redundant with much of their more advanced coursework. We plan to carry out focus groups with students enrolled this fall to verify whether this indeed is a problem. If so, then the executive committee will need to take up the issue of revision of the course and put any changes through the College of Letters and Science's curriculum committee.

- The number of students and faculty interested in human rights issues (including global health issues) has increased. The curriculum sub-committee wants to consider the feasibility of adding a human rights option and/or a human rights certificate. We will need to gather information about the number of courses, the regularity with which they are taught, and the number of faculty teaching in this area to ensure that we can deliver a rigorous program of study.
- The addition of an undergraduate peer advisor to assist our academic advisor with relatively straightforward questions about the Major, its requirements, the options, certificates available, and study abroad or internships programs.
- The development of programming (speakers, films, reading groups, clubs) directed to our students by the academic advisor. The intent is to foster a sense of community or belonging to a major among our students, with the longer-term goal of fundraising.
- The coherence and quality of the Major by conducting exit interviews with a sample of graduating students. The curriculum sub-committee also is engaged in this task as we look at prerequisites and requirements for the Major, some of which seem redundant.
- The courses that count toward the Major and their availability to our students. Our advisor is in the process of a comprehensive review of our course list from which Majors select. We need a revised and thorough listing so that we may better serve our students with the most up-to-date information about classes, ensuring that they graduate in four years.

Over the next two years, we plan to evaluate:

- How to secure more resources for the Major, in particular our need for more faculty, academic staff, or lecturers to teach designated International Studies courses, the introductory course and the capstones. In an era of tight resources, we need to explore with the College of Letters and Science and the Division of International Studies how best to meet the expanding student interest in the Major, particularly as the University highlights global competence in its strategic plan.
- The value of the Major to our alumni. We are now working with the Alumni Association and the Division of International Studies to help us survey our graduates about their experience within the Major and to learn which sectors they are employed. Our intention is to reach out to our graduates so that we might build a relationship for future fund development.
- Whether the Major should require study abroad, either long- or short-term experiences. Both students (likely through focus groups) and the steering committee will have input.

The director, academic advisor, and the executive committee will be engaged in making these assessments, including student. (However, the committee thinks that curricular decisions should not be popularity contests.) The assessment we plan for the next year will help us prepare for our next external evaluation in 2009-10.

August 22, 2008

TO: Diana Frantzen, Chair
L&S Curriculum Committee

FROM: Jo Ellen Fair, Director
International Studies Major

Re: Revisions to Major requirements

The International Studies Major had 436 declared students in the 2007-08 academic year and serves many others interested in scholarship in the field. The major was created as the International Relations major and changed to International Studies in 2001. The major requirements have not been revised since the inception of the new major in 2001.

To improve service to students, streamline business and advising processes, and to reflect current realities in course contact hours available to our majors, our executive committee agreed to revise the requirements for the major. These changes reflect how students are actually completing the major, and are intended to reduce manual intervention in student degree progress analysis (DARS).

1. **Reduce the number of required credits for the core major options from 36 credits to 35 credits.** Many courses eligible for the International Studies Major were once taught for four credits, but have since been revised to reflect actual contact hours. Consequently, many are now offered for a maximum of three credits and students are finding themselves short one credit for the major in their final semester. We have regularly authorized DARS exceptions to compensate, submitting to Student Academic Affairs 102 such exceptions in recent years. Changing the requirement to 35 credits better reflects the course options available to students while reducing the administrative cost to process exceptions on a student by student basis. We do not feel the one-credit difference affects the integrity of the major.
2. **Collapse the categories of Issues courses required for each option from 26 to four.** Currently, each Major option (Global Security, Global Economy, Global Cultures, and Global Environment) requires students take four Issues courses for the major. These courses are categorized into 26 sub-categories, a different number of which are acceptable to any given option. Students are instructed on the IS Major website (ismajor.wisc.edu) to select their four Issues courses from *at least two areas*. The proposed change to eliminate the 26 sub-categories clarifies the alignment of Issues course options with Major options, reflects the practical reality that students are already selecting courses from multiple categories, and reduces administrative overhead associated with keeping many dynamic course lists. The proposed change can be achieved simply by restating the requirement for Issues within each Major option, since it is not currently encoded in DARS.
3. **Restate that Electives within each Major option may include any Issues courses from the other three options.** Currently, each Major option lists acceptable Electives separately,

despite there being near total overlap in the courses that may count as Electives for each. A restatement of Electives streamlines and clarifies the major for students and advisors.

- 4. Eliminate the additional pre-requisite course for the Global Environment Major option.** The pre-requisite courses to declaring three of the four Major options nominally total 14 credits. However, an additional course requirement for the Global Environment option brings the pre-requisite credit total to at least 17 credits. We believe this is a deterrent to declaring that Major option and an unnecessary requirement since courses required for the Major option include the courses being eliminated. There is no special educational reason to require these courses prior to declaration of the Global Environment option.

We hope the L&S Curriculum Committee will ratify the above changes as being in the best interest of students, advisors, and the College. The nature of these changes increase student choice and remove barriers to timely degree completion. As such, they may be eligible for immediate, retroactive implementation, which we hope you will consider. In preparation of this document, we consulted with Assistant Dean Mike Pflieger about the impact of our proposed changes on DARS, and he is comfortable with them and the implementation dates.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or need further explanation of what is being proposed, please contact Rebekah Paré, advisor of International Studies, and Assistant Dean Mike Pflieger.

cc: Elaine Klein, Assistant Dean
Mike Pflieger, Assistant Dean
Tori Richardson, Assistant Dean