

## **Self-Determined Major Committee 2022–2023 Annual Report**

### **Function**

The Self-Determined Major Committee acts for the faculty in overseeing the Self-Determined Major (SDM) Program by setting the academic criteria and procedures required of self-determined majors.

### **Meetings**

The Self-Determined Major (SDM) Committee met 16 times during the 2022-2023 academic year, with 8 meetings in the fall and 8 meetings in the spring.

### **Regular SDM Business**

The Committee carried out its charge of evaluating and approving major proposals and final project proposals, for self-determined majors.

We had an unusually large number of senior majors whose final project proposals needed to be approved. Consideration of those proposals took up much of our time in the fall. The final project proposal is part of the way that SDMs fulfill the writing in the major requirement. The committee, therefore, requested revisions from all the students; some had to revise their proposals multiple times before the committee approved them. In two cases, students had to change what they proposed to do, in one case because the committee insisted upon the change and in the other because the student's initial idea did not work out.

- Approved 10 final project proposals for the class of 2023

Second, we considered six proposals for self-determined majors from students in the classes of 2024 and 2025. One student withdrew from the college. Three students' SDMs were approved after appropriate revisions, and two students' proposals are still undergoing review.

- Approved 1 new SDM for the class of 2024
- Approved 2 new SDMs for the class of 2025

Third, working in concert with the registrar's office, the director approved many routine changes to core requirements for SDMs. Four proposals from students for changes in core requirements were substantial enough to require consideration by the entire committee, which denied one and approved four. The committee also approved a student's proposal to change the name of his SDM.

### **Other Business**

The final project itself is the last part of fulfilling the college's writing requirement in the major for SDMs. Last year, the committee wrote guidelines for a newly adopted essay component of SDM final projects that do not already have a written component. We implemented those

guidelines in 2021-2022. We revised the guidelines this year based on our experience with them the first year. We decided that all SDMs in future cohorts of majors will write the essay whether their final project takes a written form, such as a senior thesis, or a non-written form, such as a dance performance. The guidelines for the essay for both sets of SDMs are included at the end of this report. The committee

- Read two essays that accompanied final projects that did not have a written component
- Considered a request to waive the program's requirement that SDMs present their final projects to the committee (normally at Academic Festival) to be eligible for program honors as indicated on both the catalog and the website, and agreed to allow the presentation to be given to the project's advisors rather than the committee
- Held two well-attended sessions at Academic Festival at which nine SDMs presented their final projects
- Reviewed faculty readers' evaluations of final projects and recommendations for program honors
- Recommended eight graduating majors for honors in the Self-Determined Major Program

The Committee completed other work related to the functioning of the program, including:

- Continued revisions to the SDM website
- Participated in ExploreMore for SDM on February 20, 2023
- Designed and completed an assessment project regarding the annotated bibliographies that senior SDMs must include as part of their final project proposals
- Began work on its first self-study, completing a draft of the section on the history of the self-determined major program

Finally, the committee would like to thank all the faculty who worked with self-determined majors this year especially as major advisors and final project advisors. We would like to acknowledge the additional work they undertake in working with the student and communicating with the committee.

### **SDM Committee Membership**

#### **2022–2023 Members**

Catherine White Berheide, Sociology, SDM Director (2024)

Ryan Homsey, Office of Academic Advising (2023)

Michael Paulmeno, Scribner Library (2023)

Sheldon Solomon, Psychology (2024)

Melora Wolff, English (2023)

#### **2023–2024 Members**

Catherine White Berheide, Sociology, SDM Director (2024)

Ryan Homsey, Office of Academic Advising (2024)

Scott Mulligan, Arts Administration, International Affairs, Media & Film Studies (2026)

Sheldon Solomon, Psychology (2024)

Melora Wolff, English (2026)

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine White Berheide  
SDM Director  
August 15, 2023

## **Appendix**

### **Class of 2023 SDM Project Essay Guidelines**

If a self-determined major (SDM) is not producing a written paper, their capstone experience must include a short essay as part of their final project. For example, if the SDM is creating a non-written artwork, such as an album, a dance, or a film, they must write an accompanying academic essay.

The essay should contextualize the artwork within its specific artistic discipline(s) by highlighting relevant cultural, historical, and aesthetic aspects. The essay may describe stylistic influences or individual artists who serve as sources of inspiration. It may also outline specific approaches and techniques employed in the creation of the artwork. Students should use their essay to demonstrate their understanding of relevant theoretical models and analytical skills within the given artistic discipline.

The essay is not intended to be a personal reflection on one's creative process, but rather, a meaningful way of rooting the artwork in a broader artistic practice and/or social context that demonstrates the author's interdisciplinary thinking and research.

### **Class of 2024 and Beyond SDM Project Essay Guidelines**

All self-determined majors must complete a short essay as part of their final project, including majors whose project is a written work. The essay should contextualize the project within its specific artistic or academic discipline(s) by highlighting relevant cultural, historical, and aesthetic elements. The final essay should indicate how the project contributes to intellectual or artistic fields.

If the project has been an artistic creation, the essay may describe stylistic influences or individual artists who serve as sources of inspiration. The essay may also outline specific approaches and techniques employed in the creation of the artwork. Students should use their essay to demonstrate their understanding of relevant theoretical models and analytical skills within the disciplines they have chosen.

The essay should not be a personal reflection on the student's process or a reiteration of project proposals and goals, but a meaningful statement that places the project in a broader practice to demonstrate the author's interdisciplinary thinking and research.

The SDM program assesses the final essay element of the project as a culmination of the SDM's writing experience in the major.