The BDIC Program: General Information

Bachelor's Degree with Individual Concentration (BDIC) is a unique program at the University of Massachusetts that offers highly motivated and self-directed students the opportunity to design their own majors. As an alternative to traditional majors, the BDIC Program allows students to pursue their educational goals in areas not available within an existing departmental curriculum on campus. Students, with the help of a faculty Sponsor, focus their major and select courses on the basis of a unifying issue, topic, theme, culture, period, or question called an area of concentration.

A BDIC concentration must be interdisciplinary, drawing from at least three fields or disciplines, and it may not duplicate an existing major. Courses may be chosen from any of the departments within the University, and from the other campuses in the Five College Consortium. Internships and Independent Studies are allowed and even recommended for many majors. Students are also encouraged to participate in the Domestic and International Exchange programs when relevant.

Each student is assigned to one of the academic clusters in BDIC: Arts and Cultural Studies; Social Sciences; Business and Law; Communication; Education and Human Services; Sustainability and Natural Science. Each student's program of study is developed with the advice and approval of both the student's chosen faculty Sponsor and a BDIC faculty Supervisor designated to a cluster.

Requirements for the Major

- Acceptance of a formal concentration proposal. The proposal must be approved by a Peer Advisor, Faculty Sponsor, and a BDIC Supervisor. The proposal is written during the student's enrollment in the program’s one credit class, Proposal Writing (BDIC 396P).

- Completion of at least twelve related upper-division courses (numbered 300 or above) in the chosen area of concentration, totaling a minimum of 36 credits over a period of at least four semesters. Each class must be completed with a minimum grade of C. Non-classroom experiences such as internships (up to a maximum of 6 credits) and independent studies (up to a maximum of 6 credits) may be accepted as part of the interrelated curriculum, with approval from the Sponsor and the Supervisor. However, a student's BDIC Program may not consist of more than a total of 9 internship and independent study credits combined. Students should, ideally, be enrolled in three BDIC courses (a total of at least 9 credits) each semester except in the case of part-time students.

- A grade of C or above in BDIC 496C (3 graded credits). This course satisfies the University's Junior Year Writing Requirement for BDIC majors. Students may also complete the Junior Year Writing Requirement in another major. Commonwealth College students may substitute the Honors project or thesis (BDIC 499P or 499T). (The Junior Year Writing requirement cannot be counted as one of the 12 BDIC major classes).
• A grade of C or above in BDIC 394I, Integration and Innovation (3 graded credits), a University-designated general education requirement. (This can be counted as one of the 12 BDIC major classes).

• Completion of a Senior Summary due during the final semester in BDIC.

• Completion of the foreign language requirement if the student’s faculty supervisor deems it essential to the student’s area of concentration.

• **Note:** Students should keep copies of all paperwork submitted to the Program: Proposal, Curriculum change requests, Senior Summary, etc.

### Application Process

It is suggested that students have at least 12 credits and a strong GPA in their areas of proposed study in order to apply to the Proposal Writing class. Second semester freshmen with a well articulated degree plan will be considered. Admission is highly competitive and is decided by a faculty committee. A number of additional criteria besides grades are considered.

The first step in the application process is to meet with a Peer Advisor who will familiarize the student with BDIC and the Program's requirements, and discuss academic and career interests. Enrolling in the freshman seminar called How to Design Your Own Major, BDIC 197A (1 credit) is highly recommended for first year students with an interest in interdisciplinary studies.

If a student decides to pursue BDIC, they should apply for enrollment in the BDIC Proposal Writing class BDIC 396P (1 credit). Application deadlines for Fall and Spring are April 10 and November 15, respectively. Applications can be picked up at the BDIC office or found online at bdic.umass.edu.

Students who are accepted into the proposal class are assisted with all aspects of the proposal writing process, including finding a Faculty Sponsor.

After the proposal is approved by the faculty Sponsor, the Peer Advisor, and the BDIC Supervisor, the student can officially sign into the BDIC major.

### The Proposal

A student who is interested in pursuing an individualized major should expect that writing a proposal will take considerable effort and time as well as imagination. In general terms, the proposal is a rationale for the BDIC major and will address why the student's interests are not served by an existing major at the University. It will also include a short description of a student's academic background and goals, career interests, the courses he or she plans to take as a BDIC major and a rationale for the choice of courses. A student also identifies, in their proposal, the faculty member chosen to be their Sponsor.

All proposals are reviewed by several people, and usually go through many drafts. A Peer Advisor reads the proposal first and makes recommendations to the student for corrections, additions, or deletions. Once the Peer Advisor believes the proposal meets the minimal criteria, the student
submits a final draft to their Faculty Sponsor. After the Faculty Sponsor has approved the proposal, it is read by a BDIC Faculty Supervisor. The Supervisor may require further changes before giving it final approval.

Writing a proposal requires research. One of the best current sources for the proposal research is the internet. By surfing the web, especially the home pages of major universities, students will find information on the history of a particular field of study and current developments within it, career options, and appropriate courses. University home pages are an excellent source for literature related to the selection of courses for a BDIC concentration. Most of these home pages post the requirements for the undergraduate majors similar to potential BDIC concentrations. One should follow the guidelines for these pre-existing undergraduate majors when putting together a curriculum plan for a BDIC proposal.

Faculty are excellent resources on campus. Faculty members who are knowledgeable in certain areas can suggest courses, independent study projects, and internships that are appropriate to a particular concentration. Seeking advice from more than one faculty member can provide different perspectives about a particular field, as well as being a good way to find a Faculty Sponsor. In addition, current and former BDIC students can be excellent sources of information. Consult the list of BDIC students and their concentrations and/or read senior summaries or portfolios of former students that are similar to the proposed concentration. Finally, it is important to seek the viewpoint of a professional in the chosen field. An interview with this individual may lay the groundwork for a possible internship later in the program.

Sponsors

Sponsors are an integral part of a student's BDIC Program. Their primary function is to serve as the student's chief advisor. The Sponsor should take an active interest in the student and also be available for the duration of the student's program. The Sponsor will assist the student in choosing courses; possibly supervise independent studies, internships or senior honors work; advise about graduate school and professional opportunities. In addition to these duties, the Sponsor will read and approve the student's BDIC Proposal, Changes to Concentration and Senior Summary.

All BDIC Sponsors must be faculty with the rank of professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, or lecturer at the University of Massachusetts or one of the other Five Colleges.
**BDIC FAQ’s (Frequently Asked Questions)**

I am a first or second-semester junior (and/or transfer student): Is it too late to get into BDIC?

Not necessarily, as long as the courses in which you are currently enrolled apply directly to the proposed concentration and meet certain criteria, or if you are willing to prolong your studies. In either case, you should come to the BDIC office as soon as possible and start the admission process.

I am a freshman and definitely anticipate majoring in BDIC. What steps should I take?

Come to the BDIC office to familiarize yourself with our requirements so you can start planning your future course work. Try to satisfy as many General Education requirements as well as prerequisites to future upper-level BDIC-related courses as possible before you start your BDIC Program as a first-semester sophomore. You should consider enrolling in BDIC 197A, How to Design Your Own Major.

Is BDIC a "real major"? What will it say on my diploma?

Yes, it is as widely recognized as any major and it is approved by the Faculty Senate. The diploma will read, “Bachelor of Arts (or Science) in Individual Concentration.” (In order to receive the Bachelor of Science degree, the student must complete at least 60 credits in the sciences.) The final transcript will indicate the name of the student’s concentration, as well as the type of degree.

Will my degree be competitive for graduate schools or post-graduate employment?

Yes. Employers and graduate schools recognize the motivation and innovation required to create one’s own major. Exit surveys have shown that the majority of BDIC students go onto careers or graduate programs directly related to their individual concentration.