

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES FIELD MAJOR - APPLICATION TO DECLARE

Introduction to the Program

The ISF field major is designed to provide students with a research-driven liberal arts education. It is a **problem-based program**, not a discipline. It is home to student research in the social sciences and humanities that is inherently interdisciplinary and comparative; grounded in time and place; with historical depth and perspective. Each major is built around a Research Field, which includes a Course of Study and a Senior Thesis. Students accepted into the ISF program pursue Research Fields that formulate and begin to address **significant research problems in the social sciences and humanities from an interdisciplinary perspective**. ISF encourages students to identify their Research Field in international, transnational, global, or comparative dimensions, and at the same time encourages students to think concretely about their Senior Thesis as work that will be grounded in time and place. The research problems chosen must be part of an academic and scholarly conversation or controversy, but can include practical steps to address the problem in question.

To apply to the program, students should already have identified their own Research Field. (To understand the qualities of breadth, interdisciplinarity and social significance that a Research Field should have, students are advised to consult the ISF-defined Research Fields on the ISF website, <http://isf.ugis.berkeley.edu/isf-research-fields>, and to meet with an adviser before submitting their application). A viable **Research Field** is more than a topic or theme: it consists of an interdisciplinary inquiry that requires engagement with both theoretical scholarship and empirical studies. A student's **Research Field** consists of a proposed **Course of Study** (at least six courses in three departments or disciplines totaling 20 units) and a tentative topic of a **Senior Thesis**. The Senior Thesis is not a summary of the Research Field but an attempt to contribute new knowledge on a focused question, using primary sources when possible, within a Research Field.

The Research Field should have the additional following qualities:

1. It cannot replicate any existing major at UC Berkeley, nor should it be a field of study that could be better pursued in an existing major, including American Studies, the Haas Undergraduate Business major, or Psychology. ISF does not allow students to escape prerequisites in existing majors or to pursue by other means a major into which the student could not gain entry, including Economics and PE. ISF can be part of a double major, but it is not a minor.
2. The Research Field (and the application essay) must show how different disciplines and methodologies will have to be mobilized to contextualize and answer the problems posed in a specific Research Field. It must, in short, be interdisciplinary, drawing on methodologies, concepts, and research designs from at least three disciplines of the social sciences and/or humanities.
3. The Research Field should yield questions that are possible to answer (in the context of the Senior Thesis) using accessible and appropriate research materials and data. Students are not required to identify definitively a Senior Thesis when they apply to the program, but they should have a good sense of their likely topic, method, and kinds of sources to be used in the research.

The ISF field major accepts students who have already put considerable effort, within their undergraduate education, into learning about the variability of cultures and societies across time and

space; and who have been exposed to several kinds of disciplinary inquiries and have a knowledge of what it means to pursue research within distinct disciplines (that is, who understand the kinds of research questions deemed appropriate in given disciplines, the kind of evidence and arguments that have been considered convincing, the social uses to which knowledge has been put, and the role of values in determining what broad social goals research should serve).

Admission to the ISF Major is not automatic. In order to be considered, the student must first contact the Student Academic Advisor who will direct the student to an ISF faculty adviser. Applications to the major must be submitted to an ISF faculty adviser via email **AFTER the student research project has been approved by an ISF faculty advisor**. Submitted applications will be evaluated by ISF Faculty to determine admission to the major. Applicants will be notified of their admission or non-admission within two weeks of application submission.

Note: You may submit this application as soon as you have completed at least one of the two prerequisite courses and are enrolled in the second course. Both courses **MUST** be taken for a letter grade. The minimum grade accepted is a B-. If only one of the two courses has been finished at the time of application, then acceptance into the major will be contingent on receiving at least a B- in the second prerequisite course. For a list of approved courses for the two-course prerequisite requirement, please see section 3.2 of the ISF Major Student Handbook and online at: <https://isf.ugjs.berkeley.edu/prerequisites/>. Students who have senior standing (More than 90 units, excluding AP and IB credit) will not be allowed to apply to the major unless they are changing their major or pursuing a double major. The 90-unit maximum does not consider in-progress units. Final acceptance into the major will be contingent on being able to finish the ISF major within L&S change of major and double major guidelines.

All applications are reviewed by the ISF Faculty using the following criteria:

Does the student’s Research Field meet ISF standards of an interdisciplinary, research-driven, liberal arts major, or is the student trying to complete a degree in another major through ISF? Has the student already been rejected by an “impacted” major? Is the student using the ISF major to avoid difficult courses, prerequisites, conflicts with athletic schedules, or other requirements of another major? Can the student’s Research Field only be completed in ISF and nowhere else on campus (American Studies, Economics, Haas Undergraduate Program, Psychology)?

APPLICATION CHECKLIST:

Please compile your application in this order, combine into one PDF file, and email the document to your faculty advisor:

- Applicant Information Sheet
- ISF Requirements Worksheet (Prerequisites and Course of Study Proposal)
- Answers to application questions on a separate document
- Transcript of all college work - Unofficial copies are acceptable. Your name should appear on Cal Central copies. If you are using courses from other schools then you **MUST** include a transcript.
- Current Class Schedule (if enrolled) – A printout is available from Cal Central.

Applicant Information Sheet

Name: _____ Student ID Number: _____
Date: _____

Berkeley Email: _____
EGT (Expected Graduation Term) (Sem/Yr): _____

Number of semesters at UC Berkeley: _____ UCB GPA: _____ Transfer GPA (if applicable): _____

Total units completed (Do not include in-progress units. Please deduct AP or IB units. Total units must be less than 90 units unless changing a major or declaring a double major): _____

Applying for a double major? Y/N _____ Applying for a change of major? Y/N _____

Research Field Title and Research Site (e.g. California; United States; South America, developing world, etc.):

Faculty Advisor: _____

Faculty Advisor signature: _____

ISF Major Application Questions

Please answer questions on a separate document.

- 1) Please describe your research field and a possible set of research questions in the research field that can only be answered by an interdisciplinary approach** (250 words; for help, see the ISF 'Research Fields' webpage page to view possible options).
- 2) What three (or more) disciplines will be combined in your effort to address your research questions?** (250 words). Please do not include a list of courses here (these will go into your Course of Study); instead, specify what you will learn from the discipline itself.
- 3) Please provide a brief annotated bibliography of the four or five books or articles that have most influenced your understanding of your chosen research field.** These might be articles, books, and studies that you have read on your own or in some of the courses you have taken so far. Write a sentence or two about each describing what you have learnt from them. (200 words).

