TO: The Academic Senate

FROM: The Committee on Academic Planning and Resources

SUBJECT: Five-Year Program Review for the B.A./B.S. Special Major Program

ACTION REQUESTED: Approval of the Program Review of the B.A./B.S. Special Major Program

The Special Major Program is different than other programs in the campus, as the program has no faculty or curriculum of its own. The purpose of the program is to provide students with the advice and the opportunity to develop their own interdisciplinary program of study utilizing campus courses and faculty. There is no curriculum common to all students in the major, and no faculty member is assigned to the program (though it does meet degree requirements in terms of upper and lower division courses).

The process of applying for the program has been revised since the last review (1991-1992). Under the old process, each school was responsible for the processing of the requests; but now the function is centralized and is performed by the office of Curriculum and Academic Programs—namely by the Associate Vice President for Curriculum and Academic Programs and his staff. The highlight of the new policy is that a minimum GPA of 2.3 is required to be eligible, a prospectus spelling out the theme of the program and specifying three faculty advisors must be devised before the program starts, and a scheduled face-to-face meeting of the three faculty advisors and the student is part of the package. Students cannot declare Special Majors until their programs have already been approved. All resources are drawn from the regular resources of the involved departments, and enrollments are credited to the departments where the students take courses.

According to the survey conducted by the Special Major Program office, the top reasons for choosing a Special Major were that CSUH didn't offer the program, that no regular program appealed to them, and that they wanted to study a special topic of interest to them. Most of the students take their classes during the day, are either transfer or re-entry students, and develop their programs when they are juniors or seniors. Approximately half of the students go directly to graduate/professional school and half go directly to work. Students hear about the Special Major program from faculty, staff, friends, and the Catalog.

The concern of the special major students is the availability of courses. Sometimes students have difficulty getting the G.E. classes they need because the major classes are infrequently offered. Students have found the face-to-face meeting of the three faculty advisors and the students somehow difficult. It helps if the advisors insure that the classes they write into a student's Special Major contract are really going to be offered during the student's remaining time at Cal State, Hayward.
It appears that the tightening up of the program and higher standard, based on the last program review, has resulted in reduction of the number of Special Majors. The number of B.A. and B.S. Special Major graduates has declined from 17 in 1994-95 to 7 in 1997-98, and the number of enrolled undergraduate Special Majors has declined from 28 in Fall, 1994 to 9 in Fall, 1998.

Faculty generally support the program and recognize it as an important educational opportunity, making students more marketable.

Because of the uniqueness of the program, the program has not been reviewed by an outside reviewer. Instead, the program at Hayward has been compared with the counterparts at San Francisco and San Jose. It has been noticed that the policies and procedures of Hayward are very similar to those at San Jose (with slightly different procedure). The major differences from SFSU is that SFSU requires a cumulative GPA for students of 3.00 to be eligible, much higher than our 2.30.

Recommendations:

CAPR confirms that the undergraduate Special Major fills a valuable role in allowing motivated students the opportunity to design their own major programs under faculty guidance. The new policy and procedure has increased the overall quality of Special Major students. CAPR does not recommend reducing the GPA standard back to 2.00. However, further study may be needed to eliminating the face-to-face meeting of all committee members and the student at the same time.

Overall, CAPR concurs that the Special Major Program is a valuable program and should be continued without modification.