

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, HAYWARD

DESIGNATION CODE: 98-99 CAPR 8

DATE SUBMITTED: May 13, 1999

TO: The Academic Senate
FROM: The Committee on Academic Planning and Resources
SUBJECT: Five-year Program Review, M.A./M.S. Special Major

ACTION

REQUESTED: Approval of the CAPR Program Review, M.A./M.S. Special Major

Like the undergraduate Special Majors Program, the M.A./M.S. Special Majors program has no faculty or curriculum of its own. Rather, the Office of Graduate Programs functions both as a department and a school for this program. In 1994, with the establishment of the Office of Graduate Programs, the M.A./M.S. Special Major degree responsibility was transferred from the Office of Curriculum and Academic Programs to the graduate programs office with the Dean of Graduate Programs as the academic administrator. Rosanne Moore, Academic Policies/Petitions Coordinator in Curriculum and Academic Programs, serves as the staff person responsible for the coordination of both masters and undergraduate level Special Majors.

Each M.A./M.S. Special Major is an individualized program of study drawn from existing university coursework. No faculty members are assigned to this program, and enrollments are credited to the departments in which students take courses, drawing resources from the regular resources of the involved departments. The purpose of the graduate Special Major program is to provide students with the opportunity to develop their own interdisciplinary programs of study when regular curricular offerings of the university do not meet specific student needs. Not surprisingly, 90% of graduate students completing a M.A./M.S. Special Major between Fall 1991 and Summer 1998 reported they pursued a Special Major because they wanted to study a special topic of interest. In addition, 40% said they could not find a regular program that appealed to them.

A student cannot declare a graduate Special Major until his/her program has been approved. A student interested in a M.A./M.S. Special Major must develop a proposed topic that is: 1) worthy in scope and depth of a Master's degree, 2) sufficiently different from existing master's degrees, 3) in an area in which faculty with appropriate expertise are willing to serve on a Special Major committee, and 4) supported by sufficient existing courses available for the student to take. The Special Major must also involve coursework from at least two different departments, both of which must offer a graduate program. The student must secure a committee composed of three faculty members (from at least two different graduate departments) and a sponsoring department. The Special Major Committee is required to meet together as a group with the student to have the Special Major program approved. To apply for a M.A./M.S. Special Major, a student must have had an undergraduate grade point average of 2.7 (raised from 2.5 following recommendations from the 1991/92 review).

Program data compiled from 1991/92 to 1997/98 indicate that the majority of graduating Special Majors had sponsoring departments in SEAS (21/50) and ALSS (19/50). Only 8 were in Science and 2 in SBE. Enrollment in Special Majors follows that of other graduate degrees at CSUH in being mostly female (63.8%) and about 47% minority students. The change in undergraduate g.p.a. requirements (instituted in 1994) coincided in an increase in minority enrollment in the M.A./M.S. Special Major program from 23% to 46%, although potential influence of g.p.a. on this enrollment change is unclear. From Fall 1991 to Summer 1998, 39% of M.A./M.S. Special Major students had undergraduate g.p.a.'s below 3.0.

Results from exit surveys sent to all graduate students with an approved Special Major between Fall 1991 and Summer 1998 (53 students) indicated that 67% of students took classes at night or took a combination of day and night courses. Most (65%) completed their Special Major in three years or less, while 27% took five or more years to complete their degree. A majority of students (56%) saw employment as their next objective. While most (44%) learned about the Special Major program from a CSUH faculty member, many (38%) also learned about the program from the catalog. The majority of students reported a high degree of satisfaction with the program.

Only 5 faculty (out of 50) who served on graduate Special Major committees between Fall 1991 and Summer 1998 responded to a survey regarding the M.A./M.S. Special Major program. With this extremely low response level, concrete conclusions are difficult to make, but all said the Special Majors program should be continued. All reported understanding their role in the process, however only 2 of the 5 reported actually meeting as a committee with the student as is required.

Recommendations: CAPR recommends continuation of the M.A./M.S. Special Major program without modification.

The M.A./M.S. Special Major program clearly continues to fulfill an important role in the university, allowing mature, self-motivated students to design interdisciplinary programs of graduate study. CAPR recommends considering raising the undergraduate g.p.a. requirement to 3.0 in accordance with requirements for Special Major graduate programs at San Francisco State, San Jose State, CSU Sacramento, and CSU Stanislaus, as well as other graduate programs at CSUH.

Furthermore, CAPR recommends continuance of the requirement for face to face meetings of committee members and the student for M.A./M.S. Special Major approval. CAPR concurs with the Dean of Graduate Studies that the M.A./M.S. Special Major program should not be used as a backdoor entrance by students wishing to receive a graduate degree while avoiding more stringent departmental requirements.