

IDS Goals and Recommendations

The IDS Committee, as directed by the Academic Strategic Plan, has worked to outline the values that inform IDS and the liberal arts at USAO and translated those values into actionable curricular changes that would affect not only IDS, but the broader curriculum at USAO. These discussions have resulted in a series of recommendations, which we outline below. All of the items below were endorsed unanimously by the IDS Committee, which consists of Jennifer Long (co-chair), Zach Simpson (co-chair), Rachel Jones, Leah Oxenford, Jordan Vinyard, Ben Wetherbee, James Vaughn, Karen Karner, Donna Gower, and Michael Coponiti. The Vice President for Academic Affairs is an *ex officio* member of the committee.

The IDS Committee identified a number of values which it wished to preserve within the IDS core. These are, in no particular order, the preservation of team teaching, continuing to meet state requirements through the IDS core, a continued emphasis on teaching multiple disciplines within IDS, and continuing to have the IDS core be an experience that spans a student's time at USAO. These are all elements we wish to preserve, if not strengthen, in any revision of IDS.

At the same time, however, we realize that IDS has shortcomings that can and should be remedied. First, the IDS Committee agreed that students would benefit from a reduction in the size of IDS, allowing more flexibility for students and the reduction of structural overloads as part of IDS staffing. This reduction could be achieved through the elimination of certain courses that do not fulfill state requirements and/or have learning objectives that could be met elsewhere in the curriculum.

Secondly, we identified a clear need for more interdisciplinarity within IDS and greater flexibility with respect to staffing team-taught courses in IDS. This would allow classes to become more experimental and dynamic and would allow USAO faculty greater ownership over IDS. Novel pairings would also generate novel course content. This need works hand-in-hand with the first value above: by eliminating selected courses, faculty are free to teach more creative courses, both individually and in teams.

Third, the IDS Committee acknowledged that IDS courses, while excellent introductions to a variety of ideas, themes, and methods, are limited in the content and depth they are capable of delivering. Students need to be encouraged, if not required, to take electives that broaden and deepen their understanding outside their majors and IDS.

Finally, the IDS committee identified a need to improve the freshman experience at USAO. This would principally be achieved by better introducing the liberal-arts values of discussion, critical thinking, and working outside one's chosen discipline during the first year.

The IDS Committee also recognizes the need for a potential re-envisioning of the courses within IDS. However, we believe the above values to take precedent and provide a necessary first step in securing the faculty flexibility that would allow for different and more interdisciplinary course content in a second-phase revision of IDS courses.

In order to achieve the above values, the IDS Committee has agreed upon a series of actions to be taken both within IDS and in the curriculum more broadly. These are:

Recommendations for IDS

In order to reduce the number of hours within IDS and allow for students to take more elective courses outside of IDS, the Committee recommends eliminating Senior Seminar, Rhetoric and Critical Thinking, Concepts of Health and Fitness, and the Physical Expression requirement. These changes would eliminate seven hours from the core. Eliminating these hours would also eliminate structural overloads associated with Senior Seminar, allowing greater flexibility for some faculty to teach within IDS. For students, this would allow more curricular freedom.

We also propose implementation of an IDS requirement for a First Year Experience (FYE) course, which would, as a three-hour course, bring the total hours within IDS to 42. This course would use faculty from various disciplines and would give freshmen a seminar experience in topics of broad interest. A separate document detailing FYE courses has been provided.

Recommendations for the Broader Curriculum

Though we endorse the elimination of Rhetoric and Critical Thinking and Senior Seminar, the IDS Committee affirms the learning objectives of both courses. Accordingly, the IDS Committee recommends making public speaking a curricular requirement that should be met (through occasional presentations, student-led discussions, and/or other comparable assignments) within at least two courses required for each student's major. Furthermore, critical thinking should be a learning objective for courses within each major. Finally, the IDS Committee recommends that majors develop capstone projects that meet the learning objectives formerly associated with Senior Seminar, namely external research, literature review, and a large research project (or, in the case of the arts, a large culminating project).

In order to more broadly and deeply educate students outside their majors, the IDS Committee recommends a 15-hour elective requirement for all students. Elective courses should come from courses outside a student's major and its associated courses. At least nine hours of electives should come from upper-division courses. This change would ostensibly affect three majors – Teacher Education, Biology, and the BFA – which would need to modify within-major hours to allow for 15 hours of electives. Because of statutory requirements, Teacher Education will be exempt from the elective requirement.

Because the above changes will significantly affect staffing, the IDS Committee also recommends (pending approval of the above items) a process whereby faculty are held harmless during a period of transition.

Summary of Changes

Overall, the changes recommended by the IDS Committee would allow for more faculty who can teach within IDS and the concomitant ability to have more dynamic, interdisciplinary, and experimental IDS courses. In the second phase of our revision of IDS, we would initiate a process of reviewing IDS courses and, in consultation with faculty, potentially revising course content and objectives.

This would mean that each student would take 42 hours within IDS and 15 hours outside of IDS and one's major, with 67 hours allowed for each major. Students would take synoptic and introductory non-major courses, as well as those that deepen understanding within both their major and chosen electives.

As a result of the above changes, faculty would be encouraged to teach courses of broader interest to students. Experimental courses would not only be allowed, but there would be sufficient flexibility from students to take and fill such courses.

In totality, the above changes would make IDS staffing more equitable and fluid, broaden the overall curriculum, and preserve the learning outcomes and structural features that are the hallmarks of IDS and USAO.