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# Special Concentrations

*Dr. Deborah D. Foster, Director of Undergraduate Studies*

The option of petitioning for a Special Concentration was established by the Faculty in 1971 for the serious student whose academic interests cross departmental lines. Special Concentrations offers a student the opportunity to design his or her own program of concentration with the advice and consent of the various members of the faculty and administration. With this option the Faculty addressed special educational objectives not accommodated by existing concentrations. Special Concentrations is not intended to encourage students either to avoid particular departmental requirements or to create a broad, unfocused concentration that could be described as “general studies.”

The Standing Committee on Special Concentrations, which is composed of faculty from a wide range of disciplines, considers individually each petition submitted and sets the general policy and educational guidelines. The detailed administration of each student’s program is supervised by his or her faculty adviser and by the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Although most Special Concentration proposals include a full tutorial program culminating in a senior thesis for honors candidates, Special Concentrations is also open to students who prefer a basic course of study. Basic concentrators submit a 14 half-course program; 16 half-courses are required of honors candidates. To the extent that there are similar requirements in the existing concentrations most closely related to the proposed Special Concentration, an honors-eligible Plan of Study must ordinarily include provision for tutorial in both the junior and senior years, and completion and evaluation of a senior thesis or equivalent. A written or oral General Examination administered by a committee of the Faculty is required.

Seniors completing the basic program are expected to enroll in Special Concentrations 96r during their final term. This course focuses on the production of a substantial piece of writing related to issues or themes of the student’s Special Concentration. The form of this composition is not prescribed and can range from an interpretative essay, to a critical review of the bibliography in the field, to a research paper on a particular topic.

There are no *a priori* minimum grade averages that an applicant must achieve to qualify for Special Concentrations or to obtain approval of a Plan of Study. It is necessary, however, that the Standing Committee be convinced not only of the quality, rigor, and legitimacy of the topic, but also of the applicant’s high level of self-motivation, perseverance, and conscientiousness, since the success of each Special Concentration depends more than in a regular departmental concentration on the drive and determination of the student. From time to time the Committee has rejected applications for concentrations that were unquestionably valid areas of academic inquiry but could not be accommodated within existing resources of the University.

The process of development from interest and idea to a detailed and approved Special Concentration may seem long and complicated, but most students have found it constructive and illuminating. Seeking out a faculty adviser and tutors provides the occasion to meet and talk with a number of faculty members, and not infrequently it turns out that a student discovers that the special plan can be accommodated within an existing department. In other cases, it is clear that Special Concentrations is an appropriate vehicle to assist a student to pursue in depth some interdisciplinary interest. The role of the faculty adviser in Special Concentrations is crucial. The principal faculty adviser must be a member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and must agree to supervise and oversee the student’s entire program of concentration from the development of the initial course structure through any necessary revisions of the Plan of Study to the General Examination required of all senior concentrators.

Each approved special concentration exists as a small committee within our program. Plans of Study for the individual concentrations are unique, but all are interdisciplinary. Several cur-

rent programs deal with health and public policy, combining coursework from history and science, economics, sociology and government. A burgeoning interest in urban studies has produced several special concentrations, some emphasizing city planning, others leaning toward government or economics. Theater and performance studies continue to be the focus of many special concentrations in recent years.

Special Concentrations represents a small but significant portion of undergraduate concentrators. It seems best for those students who have not only an unusual interest but also a clear grasp of the direction in which they are heading. Although there are exceptions, most successful Special Concentrations applications have been submitted by upperclassmen who have spent one or two terms studying in one of the College's established concentrations.

## REQUIREMENTS

### Basic Requirements: 14 half-courses

1. *Required courses:* Each concentrator's individual Plan of Study is approved as part of the process of admission to the concentration. If there is a substitution of courses for more than 25 percent of the original courses proposed, the program must be reviewed by the Standing Committee on Special Concentrations. All individual substitutions or changes in courses to be counted for the concentration must be approved by the individual's faculty adviser and by the Director of Undergraduate Studies of Special Concentrations. Any special requirement for a Special Concentration is established at the time the original Plan of Study petition is approved.
2. *Tutorials:*
  - a. *Sophomore year:* Special Concentrations 97r (one or two terms) optional. Letter-graded.
  - b. *Senior year:* Special Concentrations 96r (one term) required. Letter-graded.
3. *Thesis:* None.
4. *General Examination:* General Examination required of all seniors.
5. *Other information:*
  - a. *Pass/Fail:* No courses counted for concentration may be taken Pass/Fail except that one Freshman Seminar may be counted for concentration credit if permission to do so is obtained from the Director of Undergraduate Studies and if the student receives a positive evaluation.
  - b. Each letter-graded course for concentration must be passed with a grade of C or higher.

### Requirements for Honors Eligibility: 16 half-courses

1. *Required courses:* Same as **Basic Requirements**.
2. *Tutorials:*
  - a. *Sophomore year:* Same as **Basic Requirements**.
  - b. *Junior year:* Special Concentrations 98r (two terms) ordinarily required. Letter-graded.
  - c. *Senior year:* Special Concentrations 99 (two terms) required. Graded SAT/UNS.
3. *Thesis:* A thesis or its equivalent is required of all honors candidates.
4. *General Examination:* General Examination required of all seniors.
5. *Other information:* Same as **Basic Requirements**.

## ADVISING

Because of the nature of this program, advising is highly personalized. Students ordinarily have frequent meetings with their faculty adviser during the academic year and discuss their programs with the Director of Undergraduate Studies at least once at the beginning of each term. The Director of Undergraduate Studies also offers guidance to students interested in preparing a Special Concentration proposal for review by our Faculty Committee.

For up-to-date information on advising in Special Concentrations, please see the Advising Programs Office website: [www.fas.harvard.edu/~advising/concentrations/SpecialConc.html](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~advising/concentrations/SpecialConc.html).

## RESOURCES

Although in one sense students in Special Concentrations have no particular resources reserved for them such as special libraries or laboratories, in another and very real sense all the resources of the University are available for the support of Special Concentrators in completing their programs. Since faculty advisers and tutors in Special Concentrations come from many different Harvard faculties, it is frequently the case that Special Concentrators in Public Health have the facilities of that school open to them as those in Urban Studies have the facilities of the Graduate School of Design or the Kennedy School.

## HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

All inquiries should be addressed to the Director of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Deborah Foster, ([dfoster@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:dfoster@fas.harvard.edu) or 617-495-8056), whose office is located in Warren House (first floor), 12 Quincy St.

For more information or to download an application form, please visit our website: [www.specialconcentrations.fas.harvard.edu](http://www.specialconcentrations.fas.harvard.edu). The Director of Undergraduate Studies also maintains a current list of concentrators with the titles of their programs and the address and name of their faculty advisers. This list is available to prospective concentrators for the purpose of seeking advice from the students currently in the program.

## ENROLLMENT STATISTICS

### Number of Concentrators as of November

Concentrators	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Special Concentrations*	22	15	20	20	19

\* Special Concentrations does not participate in joint concentrations.