

Guidelines for Evaluating Independent Concentrations

An independent concentration is/has:

- a clearly articulated and cohesive area of study; the student relates the fields they are integrating in a compelling/logical way; student states desired learning objectives.
- **breadth** - consists of the range of intellectual and methodological approaches that define a field;
- **depth** - affords the opportunity for intensive study and of sustained and focused attention in a significant field of knowledge;
- a balanced and relevant course list that:
 - reflects the IC framework and learning objectives
 - follows a progression that supports a learning trajectory (introductory, intermediate, advanced, methods, capstone)
- a sequence and structure that equips students with the opportunity to integrate their studies and to see the **relationships** among the various parts of the whole field;
- a feasible capstone/thesis project, in which the student explores a research question in-depth and in an original and relevant way;
- the support of a network of scholars *at Brown*: To what extent does the IC advisor have knowledge of the proposed field of study? How accessible is the sponsor to the student?

Note: a proposal may coincide with training for a student's professional goals, but *professional training-credentialing is not the central aspect of the concentration.*

Sample A: Bachelor of Arts in Geography

...With a history in exploration of foreign lands and cartography, modern geography investigates the interaction between human beings and their environment in a spatial dimension.

Geography raises questions including where are things located? Why are they located there? And what effects does their location have on them? It provides a means of interpreting the ever-changing places and landscapes not only with regard to the physical, material character of planet Earth, but also the organization of the activity and spatial patterns of human beings as they transform their surroundings.

Processes such as the pursuit of economic ambitions, socio-political interactions, incessant changes in technological information, and historical inertia creating cultural meaning combine to produce "change, conflict, diffusion, differentiation, and repetition in the human organization of the land" ([UC Boulder Geography Department](#)). These human processes intermingle with the biophysical ones to create humanized landscapes and regions, including racial segregation in

Guidelines for Evaluating Independent Concentrations

cities, migration patterns, and international development.

While geographers study many different topics and places through field-work, map-making, geographic information systems, statistical analysis, and textual inquiry, they all share an interest in spatial arrangements and their changing nature, both literal and perceptual. As a geography concentrator at Brown, I will be able to articulate concepts that are fundamental to the discipline, including scale, region, location and context, space and place, distance and proximity. I will develop and use basic geographic skills from map reading and making to interpreting landscape and topography.

Sample B: Bachelor of Science in Music Cognition

The purpose of this independent concentration is to obtain ... a deep understanding of the cognitive, neuroscientific, and musicological bases for the classification of music as a language. By exploring the intersections of music and science, it becomes possible to understand music's revelations of the mind and brain, and also the ways in which music can be reconceptualized by the cognitive and biological processes at work in its perception and processing. ...

An understanding of the cognitive, psychological, and biological processes associated with music perception and processing forms the scientific framework of this proposal. This understanding is first achieved on a rather basic level: what are the foundations of these disciplines as they relate to sound and to music, and how is sound processed and perceived? With this foundation, the systems-level and integrative elements are engaged: what neural systems and cognitive processes are involved in musical thinking, and how do these explain the phenomena of music as a language process and our engagement and response to it?

A topical core of study in the music cognition literature must be melded with work in music theory and musicianship in the service of understanding the methods and the symbolic language off of which that literature is based. These topics in the art and practice orient the music student to think about music; "thinking about thinking about music" – a term for which I propose to be musical metacognition – will adhere them to an intellectual framework needed for scientific inquiry into the central theme above." ...I think this is a uniquely "Brunonian" focus that has not yet been undertaken here or anywhere else where programs in music cognition are offered, whose established foci are aimed almost exclusively at applications for understanding science and biology in music cognition research. An example of this extension would be a discussion of how music's syntactic structure is a revelation of the ways in which we perceive and process musical expectation, through studies in music-language semantics relations in the brain. Culminating in a project of scientific inquiry that will inform the "language lens" through which music is conceived, the concentration is rooted in quantitative methods and the scientific process of discovery.

Proposed Capstone and Thesis Samples

Concentration: AB in Visual Perception and Art

Capstone description, excerpt: Why do we notice certain things in an image or in our

Guidelines for Evaluating Independent Concentrations

environment? How do line, pattern, edge, shape, and color affect our perception? One idea for my capstone project will incorporate mechanisms of the human visual system and adaptive camouflage into a final art exhibit.

Concentration: AB in Contemplative Psychology

Thesis description, excerpt: “The Concept of Self in Morita Psychology VS Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” My intention is to understand the practice and philosophy of this Morita method through a bicultural perspective and analysis, paying attention to its similarities and differences from Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in the West. ...Research methods include interviewing practitioners and patients of both psychotherapeutic methods. ...Research on this topic will be accomplished with intensive literature review from both scientific and humanistic perspectives. ...

Proposals should avoid:

- Jargon; Proposals should define key terms and be written for a *general* audience
- Each proposal will be evaluated holistically and on its own merit. Students may not reproduce prior proposals in similar areas, or assume that their proposal will be approved because a concentration with a similar title or even course plan was approved previously.
- Having too many courses --
- Unclear or inadequate distinctions between “Core” and “Related” courses
- Too few “Bridge” courses - this could be a sign that the concentration focuses on areas not available at Brown
- Having only one faculty member (who may go on leave during time to completion)
- Thesis candidates need three readers, two of which need to be Brown faculty; primary reader must be a Senior Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor or Professor in an academic department.

Guidelines for Evaluating Independent Concentrations

Name of student & IC title:

Question	Yes No Maybe	For example:
IC Framework		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the student's explanation of the concentration well researched, compelling and clearly articulated? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the narrative, does the student adequately define their relevant fields of study and demonstrate the relationship between them? (Is the concentration cohesive?) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the student advocate convincingly for this concentration to exist independently? Is it clear why this doesn't exist within a standard concentration? 		
Courses & Capstone/Thesis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the list of core courses align with learning objectives identified in the proposal narrative? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the course sequence have an appropriate distribution of foundation/introductory, intermediate, advanced and methods courses? Is the student able to explore the field both broadly and in depth? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there significant interdisciplinary coursework that allows for engagement in 		

Guidelines for Evaluating Independent Concentrations

the field as a whole?		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the student adequately prepared to engage with the proposed project/thesis given their methods course(s) and experience/ preparation? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the description of the capstone/thesis project aligned with the student's learning objectives? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For ScB proposals: Does the course sequence follow these rough guidelines, and is the methods/research component like what ScB candidates learn and use? 		
Advising Support		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the primary faculty sponsor (who must be at the rank of Senior Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor or Professor) capable of advising within the proposed field of study? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the faculty letter demonstrate that they have already supported and will continue to work with the student to develop their learning objectives? 		
Additional Comments:		
Recommendation (<i>Approve, Tentative Approval, Revisions Requested, or Not Approved</i>):		