

Statement of Purpose

Concentration in a particular field is the means by which Harvard expects students to focus on a specific academic subject and study it in some depth. Special Concentrations exists for the student who wishes to meet special educational objectives that cannot be fulfilled within the confines of a regular department. The option for petitioning for a Special Concentration was established by the Faculty for the student whose academic interests cross departmental lines. Special Concentrations offers students the opportunity to design their own program of concentration with the advice and consent of various members of the faculty and administration. It is by no means intended to encourage students either to create a broad, unfocused concentration that could be described as "General Studies" or to avoid particular departmental requirements. In fact, it frequently increases the student's academic responsibilities as many interdisciplinary concentrations require more courses than do straight departmental concentrations.

History of the Program

Special Concentrations was established in 1971 by a vote of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Although by design never one of the larger concentrations, Special Concentrations has always had a solid core of students in widely divergent fields. There are currently some twenty Special Concentrators covering fields as varied as Media Arts, Music and Neuroscience, and Architectural Studies.

Among the perennially popular fields have been urban and dramatic studies. Interest in some areas, such as psychobiology and neuroscience, which once drew a number of concentrators, has declined due to a change in the requirements in the relevant departments allowing the pursuit of such

interests within their departmental frameworks. The popularity of certain fields waxes and wanes depending upon the current topical interest in the field and the availability of faculty advisers. For example, during the mid-1980's there was a surge of interest in Latin American studies as Nicaragua and El Salvador dominated the headlines. More recently, there has been increased attention paid to cultural studies and science and public policy.

Special Concentrations' distinguished graduates include Peter Sellars, opera and theatre director, William "Trip" Hawkins, President and CEO of 3DO and founder of Electronic Arts, and Alec Keshishian, film director.

Admissions

Special Concentrators are indeed a special breed - independent, determined and focused - and the applications process for the concentration reflects the need for these qualities in our concentrators. We ask that potential applicants submit a ten-part application form which includes a statement of purpose justifying the proposed concentration, a proposed course plan, an alternative departmental course plan, and statements of support from the prospective faculty adviser, tutor, and senior tutor/adviser.

The Faculty Standing Committee on Special Concentrations meets three times a year (September, January, and May) to review applications. In accepting students into the concentration the committee looks for evidence of the proposed plan's coherence and depth as a concentration and its adequacy as part of an undergraduate education in the liberal arts. Students must also provide certification from the department most closely related to their proposal that their plan of study cannot be pursued within an existing department.

Central to a successful proposal is the finding of a faculty adviser who can provide strong support for the student's plans. The faculty adviser should be willing to assume quasi-departmental responsibility for advising the student; tutoring him/her or finding a colleague willing to tutor him/her; discussing course selection and signing his/her study card each term; approving changes in his/her Plan of Study; arranging for thesis readings; setting and grading the general examination; writing letters of recommendation. The faculty adviser must be a voting member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and should be available for the duration of a student's career as a Special Concentrator.

Advising

Most of the advising that Special Concentrators receive comes from their faculty advisers. Concentrators should meet at least once a semester with their advisers to discuss their course selection and future plans within the concentration. They should also plan on a once-a-semester meeting with the Director of Undergraduate Studies who is also available on a regular basis for any general advising questions. The assistant to the Director of Undergraduate Studies can also provide valuable assistance to prospective and current Special Concentrators.

Degree Requirements

Basic Requirements

As each Special Concentrator's program is unique, there are very few basic requirements which apply to all students in the concentration.

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 and a clear change in focus (e.g. from Caribbean Studies to Mediterranean Studies), 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. Any special requirement for a Special Concentration is established at the time the original Plan of Study is approved.

Non-honors concentrators must take a minimum of fourteen half-courses in the concentration. The only required course is Special Concentrations 96r, a senior project ordinarily taken during the term before graduation.

Honors concentrators must present a minimum of sixteen half-courses in the concentration. A year-long junior tutorial, Special Concentrations 98r, is ordinarily required of all honors candidates. During the senior year, honors candidates must enroll in two terms of Special Concentrations 99 and produce a thesis or its equivalent.

All courses counted for concentration must be taken for a letter grade, with the exception of an appropriate Freshman Seminar which may be counted toward concentration with the permission of the Committee. Each letter-graded course for concentration must be passed with a grade of C or higher.

All Special Concentrators, both honors and non-honors candidates, must take a three-hour written, or one-hour oral general examination (please see section on "General Examination.")

Tutorials

Perhaps one of the most attractive and at the same time daunting aspects of Special Concentrations is the opportunity to take control of one's education. The choice of

courses is one's own and there are few, if any, guidelines as to what constitutes a "regular" Special Concentration. For those students who enjoy this notion, the idea of tutorials within Special Concentrations is the ultimate in controlling one's education. Tutorials allow concentrators to find a qualified tutor who has expertise in their chosen field, devise a syllabus and reading list which will meet the concentrator's interests and benefit from weekly one-on-one meetings with the tutor.

While sophomore tutorial is not mandatory in Special Concentrations, concentrators often choose to set up a tutorial in their sophomore year to ease their transition into the concentration. Honors candidates, who must take a junior tutorial, often do the same although the concentration will also accept relevant tutorials from other departments. For example, a student studying political psychology and government discovers that the Government department is offering a one-time-only junior tutorial on exactly this subject with a visiting professor. If the Government department is willing to allow this Special Concentrator to enter the tutorial, Special Concentrations would be happy to accept it as a substitute for Special Concentrations 98.

Unlike advisers, tutors do not have to be faculty members. In fact, the majority of them tend to be graduate students. The hardest part of the tutorial process is finding a tutor. Once found, tutors are usually delighted to be paid to work on a one-on-one basis with highly motivated, focused students whose interests coincide with their own.

Plan of Concentration

As part of the admissions process students present a proposed Plan of Concentration listing the courses that they intend to take for their Special Concentration. Given the regularity with which courses appear and disappear from the catalogue, it is inevitable that there will be changes in this selection

over a three-year period. Therefore we ask concentrators to update their course selection each semester so that we are kept abreast of any changes in plans. We do this by placing a copy of the latest Plan of Concentration in students' registration packets each semester and asking them to have any changes in course selection approved by their advisers. The last chance for concentrators to make changes in their plan is at the beginning of their final semester here.

Senior Thesis/Project

All candidates for honors in Special Concentrations must submit a senior thesis. This thesis usually takes the form of an essay of approximately 40 to 70 pages. Given the wide variety of Special Concentrations, however, students have often submitted material in other media. For example, we have had films, a musical comedy, an opera and a musical adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* offered in lieu of a senior essay. Students with a practical, laboratory or performing aspect to their concentration should consult closely with their adviser and the Director of Undergraduate Studies before pursuing such a senior thesis.

Choosing a Topic

Writing a thesis is a task which calls for planning, research and perseverance. Thesis writers must find a topic which combines their serious interests with an issue of concern to the scholarly world. The effort necessary to produce a good thesis cannot arise from an issue foreign to your concerns and imposed on you from without; nor can private field notes or a personal testament serve as scholarship. You should already have made progress after three years of undergraduate studies, including two semesters of junior tutorial work. To help identify your scholarly interest, look over your past work at Harvard and find those

themes or threads of interest that run through the choices you have made. Once you discover a field and a general question or set of questions, speak with those who are knowledgeable about that area in order to clarify the topic and limit it to a manageable scope. Read broadly in that area and find out what has been done and what still can be done.

Finding a Thesis Adviser

Special Concentrators usually have less trouble finding an adviser than students in other departments as they already have a good working relationship with their faculty adviser. The faculty adviser may or may not choose to act as thesis adviser, but he or she can usually direct the thesis writer to an expert in the field who will be willing to advise the thesis.

Planning the Work

The foundation of a good thesis is laid in the fall semester or sooner. A good thesis shows breadth of study and depth of insight. A senior cannot expect to read broadly in the relevant field after the fall semester; by then one must focus one's energies on the material which will appear in the final draft - on the writing and argument. One cannot afford to spend a leisurely month reading and thinking about the topic as a whole and the larger implications of one's research; instead, come spring, one will be overcome with the need to produce a finished piece of writing. This breadth can only be supplied in the relative calm of the preceding summer and fall term.

Similarly, the depth of one's argument comes from the repeated experience of making a generalization, stepping back to consider its inadequacies, and refining that position by further argument. This process of bold thesis-making and serious self-criticism necessarily takes time; it cannot be done in the month or two that is available in the spring. The result of a last-minute rush to write a thesis will be an error-ridden

superficial work. It is important to begin writing as soon as possible. Thoughts that are written out are usually more coherent. It is also easier to improve on a thought when you can look back at it a week later and show it to your adviser for comment.

Content

The primary aim of the thesis writer, whatever the area of his/her thesis, should be to express his/her ideas clearly and coherently - not in the jargon of a specialty or with unnecessarily long and involved sentences. Since the author is communicating to the reader the originality of the interpretation and the expression of the ideas, the sentence structure and the words chosen should enhance the ideas, not obscure them. There should be a clear beginning, middle and end, i.e., a clear introduction where the problems are posed or the areas to be investigated are stated; a middle containing the detailed arguments and documentation leading to the final resolution; and an end which logically concludes the two earlier sections with clarification and, if appropriate, resolution of the earlier themes or by suggested solutions to the problems posed in the first section.

For theses in scientific areas: in general, a thesis based on laboratory experiments should contain the following sections: Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion, and Brief Summary followed by a list of References which were cited in the text.

Deadlines

Three copies of the thesis must be submitted to the Office of Special Concentrations by the Thursday before Winter Holiday Recess for March degrees, or the Thursday before Spring Break for June degrees.

No late theses will be accepted without the approval of the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Extensions must be granted before

the deadline date, and then only because of a prolonged illness or other serious emergency. Thesis advisers should help students plan so as to leave time for a computer or printer breakdown, as well as a final adviser's response and a thorough proofreading.

Proofreading

The author is responsible for all typed material, and therefore typographical errors, misspellings, and other inconsistencies should be corrected. An excessive number of errors of this type will lower the thesis grade.

Length

There is no absolute minimum or maximum, although in general the thesis should be between 40 and 70 pages. These limits refer to the main text of the thesis, including footnotes, but not bibliographies, glossaries, or appendices.

Style & Format

Paper should be 8_ x 11 inch acid-free bond paper and should say "acid-free," "acid-neutral" (pH 7.0-8.5) or "buffered". Common types are: Xerox XXV Archival Bond and Howard Permalife. Hammermill's acid-free recycled paper is also acceptable; it is the least expensive. Please note: Only the copy for Archives must be on acid-free paper.

Leave 1_" on left edge (binding edge) and 1" on all other sides. Pages should be numbered. Font size should be 12 point. Manuscripts should be double-spaced, except for long quotations, footnotes and references. Notes, bibliography, and other matters of style should consistently follow the guidelines in one of the following style manuals: *MLA Handbook, A Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press), *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian, or *Form and Style In Thesis Writing* by

William Campbell. The choice of which manual to follow should be discussed with one's adviser.

Illustrations

Black and white is preferred since color is not permanent. Dry mounting is acceptable for photographs. Use a good quality, acid neutral paste (Uhu). Do NOT use rubber cement, cellophane or gummed tapes.

Sample title page form

Title
A thesis presented by
Name
to
The Committee on Degrees in Special Concentrations in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree with honors of Bachelor of Arts Harvard College
Date

Copies

Three copies must be submitted, an acid-free original for Archives and two clear photocopies for readers. Students should also have a fourth copy for their personal use.

Binding

Do NOT use a binder for the Archives' copy. Also, do NOT staple, do NOT punch holes in paper, and do NOT use rubber bands, they can tear the paper. Simply put a large clip in the corner and put into a manila folder. Binders may be used for readers' copies if desired.

Proper Documentation and Plagiarism

To plagiarize is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "to present as one's own an idea or product derived from an existing source." Even when the source is noted, concealed quotations or extended paraphrases that read as though the ideas were the student's own are considered instances of plagiarism. Every student should discuss the subject thoroughly with his or her adviser, and make every effort to avoid even the most unintentional appearance of undocumented borrowing of ideas. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense in an academic community and the usual response of the Administrative Board of the College to cases of plagiarism is requirement to withdraw. For more information see *Handbook for Students*.

Evaluation of the Thesis

The faculty adviser is ultimately responsible for finding readers for the thesis. Students are encouraged, however, to pass on any suggestions for readers they may have to the faculty adviser.

Two readers are assigned to each thesis. Grading is based on the system below. If the readings return with widely disparate grades, e.g. a *summa* and a *cum*, the opinion of a third reader is sought.

The final thesis grade is the average of the two readers' grades. *Summa* is given only rarely, because it means that, in the reader's judgment, the thesis is extraordinarily

original, powerfully argued, beautifully written, in short --- remarkable.

Theses in the "magna" range have one or more truly outstanding qualities. They take on interesting and challenging subjects and handle them with skill and independence. The prose should be excellent.

A "cum" means that very good work has been done and reasonable expectations for handling the subject have been met. A "cum" should not represent merely the satisfactory completion of a task.

A student does not automatically receive a *cum* minus merely because he or she has written a thesis. A grade of "not worthy of honors" is reserved for those circumstances where the thesis is hastily and carelessly constructed, a mere summary of existing material, or is poorly thought through.

Dropping the Thesis

The Committee may exclude from Special Concentrations 99 any student who is not doing satisfactory work in tutorial. Credit will be given for half of Special Concentrations 99 if the requirements below are met.

If a student decides to drop honors at mid-year with half-course credit for Special Concentrations 99, s/he must submit a 30-page paper to his/her tutor by January 15. The first half of Special Concentrations 99 will then count as fulfilling the Special Concentrations 96r requirement for non-honors concentrators.

General Examination

All Special Concentrators, honors and non-honors, must take and pass a general examination. This examination can be taken either as an oral or a written exam. The written exam is three hours long and the oral exam is one hour long. The oral exam

is not a defense of the thesis or project, but an oral version of the written exam.

The faculty adviser is responsible for writing the questions on the exam and for grading it. Students should consult with their advisers as to how to prepare for the exam. The most usual method is that the student and the adviser agree on a reading list upon which the exam will be based.

The adjective "general" in the title General Examination should not be understood to indicate that students are to answer questions in a general manner, but rather that the questions themselves are designed to test the broad spectrum of their knowledge about their concentration.

Concentrators will be expected to draw upon the courses they have taken and more particularly on the primary and secondary reading they have done either in course work or in tutorial in order to give examples, support their statements, or to pin down specific references made. While it is not expected, of course, that a General Examination will contain footnotes, the more specific information included, the more the reader will get an impression of comprehensive knowledge. Unsubstantiated assertions and gratuitous comments do not advance one's argument or contribute to the examination.

In the written examination, students will, in some cases, be asked to spend the entire three hours on one essay, though it is more usual to have one large essay and several smaller ones. Students are well advised to spend some time, particularly in regard to the longer essays, in organizing their thoughts and preparing a brief outline of the answer.

Honors Determination

Senior honors candidates are assigned a numerical score made up of grades in concentration courses, general exams and

thesis. Each is weighted approximately as follows: courses = 50%, thesis = 30% and general exams = 20%.

In making its recommendations to the Faculty, the Standing Committee on Special Concentrations also takes into account the student's entire record (other grades, tutorial reports, substantive comments by thesis readers, and comments by the faculty adviser.)

To qualify for highest honors, the thesis must have at least one *summa* level reading and one *magna* reading. To qualify for high honors the thesis must have at least one *magna* level reading. To qualify for honors, the thesis must have at least one *cum* level reading.

Candidates who qualify for highest honors (*summa cum laude*) will ordinarily be given an oral examination. The oral examination for *summa* candidates generally lasts one hour.

At the beginning of their final semester, concentrators receive the last update of the courses they have listed as counting for concentration credit. If they have recorded more than sixteen, they should consult with their Faculty Adviser and with the DUS to determine which courses will be taken into account for Honors calculations. Concentrators should be aware that courses in progress during this final semester will not enter into the Committee's honors recommendation, as final grades will not be available by the time honors are voted.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who should sign my study card?

Your study card should be signed by both your faculty adviser and the Director of Undergraduate Studies for Special Concentrations. The same is true for any

changes you make to your course selection, i.e. drops, adds or withdrawals.

What if I want to take courses not on my original Plan of Concentration?

You will need to discuss your planned change with your faculty adviser and have him/her signal approval of the change by initialing your updated Plan of Concentration which you submit each semester. You should also discuss the proposed change with the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

Who is responsible for the "conc" marks on my transcript?

The Director of Undergraduate Studies updates sophomore and junior records annually. Senior records are updated twice, once in November and once in March.

How can I arrange an independent study within Special Concentrations?

You can arrange to take a graded course of supervised reading and research, known as 91r, but the Director of Undergraduate Studies must approve the arrangement.

Can courses "double count" to meet both Core and Special Concentrations credit?

Yes.

How many and which courses may I take Pass/Fail?

None of your Special Concentrations requirements may be taken Pass/Fail.

Can I count a Freshman Seminar towards requirements in Special Concentrations?

Yes, with the permission of the Committee.

As a transfer from another college, can I receive any credit toward degree requirements in Special Concentrations for previous course work?

Yes, you will receive credit towards fulfillment of requirements for those courses which are (1) approved for Harvard credit by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and then (2) approved for Special Concentrations credit at the time you apply to the concentration. (The grades received for courses taken elsewhere do not contribute to a student's Special Concentrations grade average.)

If I am admitted to Special Concentrations as a junior, can I count sophomore or junior tutorials in another concentration?

Yes, if these tutorials are relevant to your Special Concentration.

Can I get credit for summer school courses?

For Harvard Summer School courses which are included in your Plan of Concentration, you can. For courses taken elsewhere, please see the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

What if I need an extra semester to complete requirements?

You should see your Allston Burr Senior Tutor, who will explain the process for petitioning the Administrative Board for an extra semester.

Can I do a "creative" project for my senior thesis?

Yes. Special Concentrations is often the last refuge for students who are unable to fulfill their goals of a "creative" thesis in another department. Students considering a "creative" thesis should be able to demonstrate, however, that their thesis is solidly rooted in scholarship and is the culmination of a coherent, in-depth plan of study in their field.

