



# LETTERS,

## Undergraduate Studies

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# ARTS, *and*

# SCIENCES

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A Student Guide

PENNSTATE



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### *Is LAS right for you?*

- Program requirements
- Proposal guidelines
- Policy statements
- Proposal coversheet

### **What is Letters, Arts, and Sciences?**

Letters, Arts, and Sciences, or LAS, is a multi-disciplinary, theme-oriented, and student-designed Liberal Arts major leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. Students formulate a unique theme (a topic, idea, or issue they wish to explore). After thorough research and consultation with a Letters, Arts, and Sciences adviser, they design a program of study that investigates that theme from the viewpoint of at least three liberal arts subject areas.

### **Who should enter the Letters, Arts, and Sciences major?**

If you have thoroughly investigated the many majors at Penn State and believe that none of them addresses your particular academic interests, you may wish to design an individualized plan of study that consists of courses offered by various departments. To be a Letters, Arts, and Sciences student, you must have an interest in several fields rather than only one, and you must make a commitment in time and effort to design your own coherent plan of study. Advisers in the Undergraduate Studies office (101 Sparks Building) are available to assist you as you explore the many options available to you in the College. If, after your investigation of majors in the standard disciplines, you find that none can adequately meet your academic goals, you may be a candidate for Letters, Arts, and Sciences.

### **Who should *not* enter the LAS major?**

Letters, Arts, and Sciences is not designed to accommodate students who have been unsuccessful at meeting their academic goals (failed to meet entrance-to-major requirements) in another major. Similarly, Letter, Arts, and Sciences is not designed to provide a major for students who have accumulated many credits and wish to use them most efficiently (students who have changed majors several times and completed many credits in unrelated disciplines). **Students may not duplicate existing majors from any academic area.** As a Letters, Arts, and Sciences student, you are required to think about your goals and plan more thoroughly and thoughtfully than you would in most other majors. Since the LAS major is not prescriptive in terms of course selection, you will be called upon to engage in a continual process of evaluation that will lead you to make informed decisions. Unless you are prepared to assume these responsibilities, you should not consider entering the Letter, Arts, and Sciences major.

### **WHAT ARE THE PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS IN LETTERS, ARTS, and SCIENCES?**

To earn a Bachelor of Arts degree in Letters, Arts, and Sciences, a minimum of **120 credits** is required in the following areas:

**General Education:** 45 credits

**B.A. Degree Requirements:** 12–24 credits

**Major Requirements:** 36 credits all major courses must be completed with a “C” or above.

**Electives:** 15 – 27 credits

## **CORE**

Each of these courses must relate to your theme and contain the elements of the skills outlined below.

**Research methods/projects**—3 credits in a course that involves research methodology or that focuses on a research project relevant to your plan of study. Types of courses include: all courses numbered 294/494, all laboratory courses, all statistical analysis courses, all research methodology courses.

**Critical analysis**—3 credits in a course that focuses on evaluation, synthesis, and analysis. An independent study course designed to be a capstone course for your plan of study is recommended. Other types of courses include: criticism, comparative studies, and policy analysis.

**Communication skills**—3 credits in a course that focuses on verbal, written, or symbolic expression. Types of courses include: speaking, writing, acting, production of the fine arts, signing, and symbolic logic.

**Theory/application**—3 credits in a course that focuses on theory, principle, central concepts, or fundamental issues in a disciplinary group. Types of courses include: theory, major figures, basic problems, and basic principles.

## **OPTION**

Each of these courses must relate to your stated theme, and at least three subject areas must be represented. A minimum of 15 credits must be at the 400-level.

**CORE:** 12 credits related to your theme and chosen to develop the skills below.

3 credits research methods/projects

3 credits critical analysis

3 credits communication skills

3 credits theory/application

**OPTION:** 24 credits

24 credits chosen to further develop your major theme. At least 15 credits must be at the 400-level. At least 9 credits must be in the social sciences and humanities

The LAS **capstone course:** As part of your 15 credits of 400-level work, you must complete a capstone course or experience that will help you reflectively consider what you have learned in your individual courses related to your overall theme and apply your knowledge and skills in a unified manner. Options for the capstone may include a lecture or seminar course that meets the goals of a capstone and relates to your theme, undergraduate research credits (culminating in a project), internship credits (when the internship is appropriately centered on your theme), thesis credits, independent study credits, or education abroad credits (when the study abroad experience is central to your theme).

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL

You are undertaking an enormous responsibility by choosing Letters, Arts, and Sciences as your major. In an established major faculty within their departments have already determined the courses students must complete to develop competency in a discipline; the major curriculum is then reviewed and approved by the University Faculty Senate. As a Letters, Arts, and Sciences major, however, *you must do the work* to design a program with academic integrity worthy of a Bachelor of Arts degree. To be eligible for entrance to the major, you must then submit a thoughtful and well written proposal to the College's Letters, Arts, and Sciences committee for review. You may not duplicate existing majors from any academic area. ***Your proposal must be submitted and approved prior to completion of 60 credits; therefore, it is important to begin work on your proposal before the spring of your sophomore year. If your proposal is denied, you will not be eligible to major in Letters, Arts, and Sciences***

### I. BEFORE YOU WRITE YOUR PROPOSAL

Thoroughly explore other majors, both in the College of the Liberal Arts and in other colleges, to make certain that there is no other major, or major/minor combination that will accommodate your needs. Develop a clear understanding of your theme of study, narrowing it down as much as possible. Avoid vagueness and generalities. Consult a Letters, Arts, and Sciences adviser to ensure that you understand the major, then take the following steps before you begin to write your proposal:

- Using the current catalog as a guide, make a list of courses you would like to take in support of your theme.
- Obtain syllabi of the courses on your list, or consult professors who teach those courses. Will those courses provide the knowledge you seek?
- Ask departments how often courses are offered, and during what semesters. Some course may or may not be viable choices. You need to know this before you include them in your proposal.
- Investigate academic or enrollment controls (alternates must be listed for any controlled courses).
- Check on prerequisites. Make sure you build prerequisites into your academic plan as general education or elective courses.
- Make sure that at least three subject areas are represented in your selection of courses (if your list reflects a majority of courses in one subject area, you should consider majoring in that discipline).
- Using a Letters, Arts, and Sciences audit, plan your courses semester-by-semester to verify that you will meet all general education, Bachelor of Arts, elective, and major requirements.

### II. WRITING YOUR PROPOSAL

Your proposal must follow the format below:

#### 1) Proposal Coversheet

Complete the coversheet enclosed in this packet; be sure to include a brief statement of your theme.

## **2) Statement of Theme**

This is an in-depth essay in which you a) clearly and precisely articulate your theme of study, and  
b) explain why you are not able to accomplish your goals in a standard major.

## **3) Academic Plan**

This is a detailed justification of your selection of each course in the core and option. In the core, you must justify how each course relates to your theme, as well as how each course leads to the development of skills in the prescribed categories (research, critical analysis, communication, and theory/application). In the option, you must justify how each course relates to your theme, and how the courses are related to one another. This section should not simply reiterate course descriptions or informational content; rather, it should address your specific curricular expectations.

## **4) Statement of Educational and Career Expectations**

This is an essay in which you summarize your educational and career goals.

## **5) Summary of Related Activities**

This is an essay in which you summarize any activities (extracurricular, employment, internship, etc.) that contribute to or are enhanced by your academic plan.

### **III. SUBMIT YOUR PROPOSAL**

Submit your proposal to your Letters, Arts, and Sciences adviser for review. **Note that your proposal must be completed approved in the Liberal Arts Undergraduate Studies office prior to completion of 60 credits**, so plan in advance to allow enough time for any suggested revisions. Your adviser will contact you when your proposal has been reviewed.

### **IV. DECLARE YOUR MAJOR**

Approval of a proposal does not guarantee admission to the Letter, Arts, and Sciences major. If approved, you must complete the CHANGE OF MAJOR paperwork to declare Letters, Arts, and Sciences as your major.

### **V. CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT**

Your plans may change as you progress through your education. Similarly, you should plan to participate in a continuous assessment of your academic plan to make sure that it accurately reflects any change in your educational or career goals.

### **POLICY STATEMENTS FOR LETTERS, ARTS, and SCIENCES STUDENTS**

#### **MINORS**

Courses that fulfill minor requirements may be double-counted without restriction in the Letters, Arts, and Sciences core and option.

#### **TRANSFER CREDITS**

A maximum of 3 credits of transferred coursework may be counted as a 400-level selection in the option; students must provide documentation of the upper-division nature of that work.

**CUMULATIVE USE OF GENERICALLY NUMBERED COURSES** (x94, x95, x96, and x97)

Students may use a maximum of 6 credits of generically numbered credits in the option (i.e. any combination of x94, x95, x96, and x97). Specific limits are outlined below:

**Special Topics:** maximum of 6 credits

**Independent Study:** maximum of 6 credits

**Internship:** maximum of 3 credits

**Research:** maximum of 6 credits

**INDEPENDENT LEARNING**

No student may complete the Letters, Arts, and Sciences option primarily through Independent Learning.

**ENTRANCE-TO-MAJOR REQUIREMENTS**

To be eligible to enter the Letters, Arts, and Sciences major, students must have:

- an approved Letters, Arts, and Sciences proposal on file prior to completion of 60 credits;
- a 2.00 cumulative grade point average;
- an average of C or higher in courses already taken for the major;
- a minimum of 27.5 credits completed.

**GRADUATION STANDARDS**

Letters, Arts, and Sciences students are subject to the same graduation standards as all other baccalaureate degree candidates in the College of the Liberal Arts. See the document Degree Requirements and Policy Statements for details.