

In the fall of 2008, the Committee on Majors polled all departments and programs on their positions with regard to the establishment of minors.

Below is a selection of responses (in favor, ambivalent, and opposed) offered by Directors of Undergraduate Studies in a variety of disciplines. They have given their permission for their responses to be quoted in this report.

Each Director of Undergraduate Studies of our 70+ department and program based majors was asked to poll its faculty on two questions:

1. Is your department in favor of minors, and if yes or no, why?
2. If minors were to be established, should they be optional, or should all departments be required to establish one?

To date we have received 48 DUS responses. In response to the first question, 23 departments/programs were in favor, 8 gave responses that were either ambivalent/mixed or neutral, and 17 were opposed. In terms of the numbers of juniors and seniors enrolled in these three position groups, those in favor had a total enrollment of approximately 530, those ambivalent approximately 300 (including 136 in English—whose responses were mixed and leaning toward “no”), and those opposed approximately 1680. Of those DUSes that did not respond, almost all were interdepartmental/ interdisciplinary (ID) programs. Almost all of those majors with large enrollments were opposed to establishment of minors. Conversely, most of the programs with smaller enrollments were in favor—with the exception of the majority of the ID programs who responded (12 of 14 were opposed or ambivalent for a variety of reasons). Of those departments/programs who responded to the second question, the vast majority felt that establishment of minors should be optional.

A table of responses appears on the next page of the appendix. Excerpts from representative responses appear on the following pages.

Summary of the 48 DUS responses received from Dept/Programs
(numbers indicate total # of junior/senior majors in 07-08)

IN FAVOR

- Architecture (45)
- Astronomy (8)
- Chemistry (27)
- Classics (31)
- Computer Science (35)

- East Asian Studies (31)
- EE&B-qualified yes (~18)**
- Eng. & App. Science (0)
- Film Studies (25)
- French (10)
- Geology/Geophysics (10)
- German (8)
- History of Art (46)
- Italian (4)
- Judaic Studies (1)
- Linguistics (22)
- Mathematics (62)
- MB&B (57)
- Portuguese (0)
- Sociology (24)
- Spanish (14)
- Statistics (new)

Total majors: 528

AMBIVALENT/Neutral

- African Am. Studies (10)
- East Asian Lang & Lit (6)
- English (136)
- Humanities (43)
- Philosophy (64)
- Physics (41)

- Slavic Languages (certificate preferred) (3)
- South Asian Studies (new)
- WGSS (3)

Total majors: 306

OPPOSED

- Anthropology (with qualifications) (47)
- Archeological Studies (5)
- Art (33)
- Comparative Lit. (64)
- The 4 Comp. Sci. joint majors (CS& Engineering, CS&Math, CS& Psych, CS& Art) (*)
- Economics (331)
- Economics & Math (*)
- History (386)
- Latin American Studies (14)
- Math & Physics (*)
- MCDB (~170)**
- Political Science (392)
- Psychology (194)
- Theater Studies (40)

Total majors: 1676 +

* not available; numbers split between participating Depts.

** numbers are approximate because both EEB and MCDB are tracks in the Biology major.

Representative Survey Responses

In Favor

“Yes, the Chemistry Department is in favor of establishing a Minor in Chemistry since there is a

community of students with major interests in closely related fields who would benefit from a degree indicating specific expertise in Chemistry.”

- Victor Batista, Chemistry

“Although we have a number of students who elect a double major, one part of which is Geology and Geophysics, the percentage that complete all requirements is not large. We think that a Minor might solve that problem.”

- Brian Skinner, Geology

“We feel that the Minor would benefit all undergraduates, enabling them to give further shape and definition to their academic experience at the College. In general, the Minor would confer logic and coherence upon a cluster of courses that would constitute a secondary area of expertise. As things stand now, students who wish to develop a second field can only do so through a double major—a prospect that can be excessively burdensome, in terms of time, energy, and the logistics of course scheduling. The option of a minor would hold special appeal to a number of student constituencies. For those who feel pressured into choosing majors on a ‘vocational’ basis, the Minor can offer a chance to pursue and develop in some depth a field with less obvious ‘real-world’ applications. For those who have studied abroad and would like to continue work in their chosen language and culture but are committed to another Major, the prospect of a Minor would serve as both justification and goal. Given the university’s timely and commendable push toward globalization, a Minor would offer much-welcome administrative support toward that end. In life after Yale, the addition of the Minor credential would enrich our students’ profiles as they move on to the next phase of their education, or enter an ever more competitive marketplace.”

- Millicent Marcus, Italian, seconded by Tom Kavanagh and the faculty of French

“A large percentage of students studying Italian develop a special interest in it, and would like to develop further their knowledge of the language and culture. A Minor would acknowledge these students’ choice of a secondary area of expertise, as for most of them it is virtually impossible to major in Italian [since they do not yet know the language when they arrive at Yale]”

- Angela Capodivacca, Italian

“The Judaic Studies program supports the establishment of a Minor in the discipline of Judaic Studies. Although we have very few majors, many Yale College students take a large number of Judaic Studies courses. We would like to be able to recognize these ‘de facto’ Jewish Studies Minors. In addition, it seems clear to us that additional students will take advantage of the rich course offerings in Judaic Studies if in so doing they are working towards a Minor.”

- Christine Hayes, Judaic Studies

Mixed

“As you can imagine, there were many in the department who favored the creation of an English minor, and many who did not. There were those on both sides of the question who wondered what a meaningful minor would look like, and whether our particular discipline was one that lent itself to a substantive minor. But much of our discussion revolved around questions concerning the motives behind Yale College’s initiation of the creation of minors.”

- John Rogers, English

“There was a general sense that a minor in philosophy would be appealing to students, but there were a number of concerns: whether we would lose some of our present majors to the minor; whether a minor of, say, five or six courses would be sufficiently rigorous; and whether tracked minors might interfere with the integrated majors we already offer [with other departments]”
- Ken Winkler, Philosophy

Opposed

“Enabling our students to garner additional official credentials would, paradoxically, lead to a decrease in breadth in student course selection, as they focused in on their major and multiple minors in the sophomore to senior years—some would doubtless begin the process in their very first semester freshman year.
- Charles Bailyn, DUS of Astronomy, expressing his own individual view

“Many overzealous students arrive here with the thought that more is better and that two majors will be a richer intellectual experience or stand them in better stead in life after Yale. Most of these students come to realize that a second major is not an increase in intellectual opportunity but a significant decrease, requiring them to take courses in fulfillment of requirements when they really have intellectual interest in taking courses outside the double major.”
- Leslie Brisman, English, expressing his own individual view

“In Economics, we are a little skeptical of the need for or desirability of introducing Minors in Yale College. Our main concern is that accreditation inflation may have damaging effects on education in Yale College. Creating minors may create bad incentives for departments, for employers and, above all, for students...It will be hard for advisors to convince [a hypothetical student majoring in Economics with a minor in Political Science] to take broader courses [such as Italian history or literature] that are right for her rather than add the credential [of a Political Science minor] to her degree. In economics, we want students to choose their courses outside the major on the basis of what are the best courses and what are the most intellectually valuable to those particular students, not on the basis of what gives the student another credential.... The College tends to put too much weight on the number of majors in each department rather than the number of students (majors or not) taking good courses in each department.... [As an alternative,] the effective rule for double majors that a senior essay can only count for one major could be relaxed. We should be encouraging students to combine disciplines in their research.”
- Ben Polak, Economics

“The basic feeling of the Political Science faculty was that there were no compelling intellectual or educational reasons to introduce minors, and that they would be administratively burdensome.”
- Sue Stokes, Political Science

“As a small program, we don’t have the resources to advise the increased number of students who, as minors, will still be expected to complete a senior project, one that often involves theater production...
But the deeper reason for our aversion to the idea is pedagogical. Our program once offered what was called a ‘combined major’ in Theater Studies—a close cousin of a minor...The 7-course ‘tasting menu’ (or what one colleague, referring to the minor, calls an ‘educational coffee

break') failed to give students adequate exposure to the subject. Students skimmed the surface of a number of aspects of theater studies, or, at the opposite extreme, focused so narrowly on one aspect that they graduated with little knowledge of the breadth of theater practice and history. While a Theater Studies minor is not right for us, we have no objection to the creation of minors in other fields."

- Marc Robinson, Theater Studies

Alternative Proposals

For an "extended distribution" requirement: Groups of 4-8 courses on:

"Science and Quantitative Reasoning

Moral and Ethical Reasoning

Physical Sciences

Biological Sciences

Western Civilization

Multicultural Studies

Modern American Culture

Classical Civilization

Environmental Studies

Public Health

Foreign Language and Culture

And likely various others."

- Charles Bailyn, Astronomy, developing an idea contained in the CYCE report, p. 39

For a certificate:

"We in the Slavic Department would be especially keen on having a language certification instituted that would be sort of like a minor. Students would study a foreign language and then get tested by someone qualified to evaluate according to national standards. This would be coordinated by CLS and run by qualified people in departments.... We think this would be a better thing for language and literature departments than would be an even more watered down minor in Russian Literature."

- Hilary Fink, Slavic Languages and Literatures