From the 2013-14 Vanderbilt undergraduate Catalog, p. 88:

**Individually Designed Interdisciplinary Majors**

This plan permits students to contract for an individually designed program of concentration consisting of at least 48 hours of approved work. The program is constructed around a coherent academic purpose and may draw together the academic resources of a number of departments and schools. The program’s purpose may include topical, period, or area studies. The student may be required to achieve a standard of proficiency in appropriately related areas such as foreign languages or mathematics in addition to the 48 hours constituting the program of concentration. A student who wants to develop such a program must first discuss it with a dean.

The student’s contract for an individually designed interdisciplinary major is a statement of required courses. Furthermore, because of the nature of interdisciplinary majors, all courses that have previously been included in the student’s contract are considered to be part of the major discipline. The student must achieve at least a 2.000 average in all courses that are (or have been) part of the contract.

Proposed revision (changes in red):

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Degree Program in the College

The Bachelor of Arts
The bachelor of arts degree is granted upon successful completion of the following five requirements:

1. At least 120 semester hours of creditable college work,
2. A final grade point average of at least 2.000,
3. Completion of the AXLE requirements,
4. Completion of one of the options listed under Area of Concentration,
5. Completion of at least 102 hours of course work within the College of Arts and Science, or a minimum of 90 hours for those students with a second major outside the College of Arts and Science.

Limitation on Hours outside the College
Candidates for the bachelor of arts degree must successfully complete a minimum of 102 hours within the College of Arts and Science. Students who are completing an approved second major from one of the other schools within Vanderbilt are required to complete 90 hours within the College of Arts and Science for the bachelor of arts degree.

AXLE: Achieving Excellence in Liberal Education
The Arts and Science core program of study—known as AXLE—is anchored in intensive practice in writing and a diverse thirteen-course component of classes that has been designed to allow maximum choice in course selection (based on student interests and achievement levels). At the same time, the distribution requirements of AXLE ensure that students move beyond the mere acquisition of information to inquire into the deeper issues within their studies, and to connect their learning across disciplines and cultures as they live and work in the communal environment of Vanderbilt. The end product of a successful liberal arts education is a thoughtful citizen who is prepared to take up his or her rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, to analyze and critique received information, to articulate the issues at hand or the personal values at stake, and whose intellectual life is marked by ongoing internal dialogue with the self about the quality and meaning of life for him or her, as well as for the community at large.

Fear No Learning!
The interdisciplinary inclination of many courses in the College of Arts and Science is an ideal training ground for learning new methodologies for problem solving in the complex, global world of the 21st century. Here, students may work with biologists and psychologists in the Neuroscience program; study with creative writers, sociologists, historians, or film scholars in the African American and Diaspora Studies program; or take a class, team taught, by professors from the School of Music and the Department of English in the College of Arts and Science. Over the course of a Vanderbilt education, students challenge themselves with the academic demands of the classes they select, and are challenged by new ideas and unfamiliar ways of looking at issues. Exploring beyond the boundaries of one’s intellectual comfort zone in order to admit new ideas is one of the most important aspects of higher education. The time and effort devoted to thoughtfully selecting the courses to take for the fulfillment of AXLE requirements prepares students for the more specialized study that they undertake in their major (or majors) beginning in the third year of study.

What Is AXLE?
AXLE is the acronym for Achieving Excellence in Liberal Education. It is the core curriculum that all students in the College of Arts and Science must fulfill. The AXLE curriculum is flexible and very user-friendly. It consists of two parts: the Writing Requirement and the Liberal Arts Requirement.

The Writing Requirement has four segments: completion of English 100 or demonstration (by a combined score of 1220 on the Writing and Critical Reasoning sections of the SAT test with a minimum score of 500 in each, or a score of 27 on the English portion combined with a score of 7 on the Writing portion of the ACT test, or by appropriate AP or IB credit in English) of basic skills in English Composition; completion of a First-Year Writing Seminar; completion of a 100-level (introductory) writing course no later than the fourth semester in residence; and completion of either a second 100-level writing course or a 200-level (discipline-specific, major-oriented) writing course or a course in oral communication.

The Liberal Arts Requirement is composed of a total of thirteen courses taken at Vanderbilt, and distributed across six categories. The First-Year Writing Seminar and all 100-level and 200-level writing courses are also counted in the thirteen-course Liberal Arts Requirement.

What Is Liberal Education?
The study of the liberal arts—what is historically called a liberal education—is the oldest and most venerable form of higher education. It has proved itself to be perennially flexible and adaptive over the past centuries, and it remains the single best educational preparation for further, specialized study in the professions (medicine, law, education, business, et al.), and to prepare for doctoral work in the humanities and social sciences and advanced research in the sciences. The holistic focus of a liberal education encompasses all areas of human knowledge: the natural and social sciences, mathematics, foreign languages and cultures, the arts, and the humanities. The empirical-based disciplines tell us what to do to live most productively and efficiently. But the rest of the curriculum—the humanities and the arts—makes it possible to reflect upon what is right to do with the remarkable scientific knowledge we have acquired. In a liberal arts education, content is always considered in its larger context. Thus, the reflective and discursive aspects of study in the liberal arts call upon students to move beyond the mere acquisition of information to inquire into the deeper issues within their studies, and to connect their learning across disciplines and cultures as they live and work.

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Hello Jonathan,

I think Karen Campbell communicated the gist of our reconsideration of the catalog language defining the INOT. I’ve put it all together below, with suggested changes in red:

This plan permits students to contract for an individually designed program of concentration consisting of at least 48 credit hours of approved work. The program is constructed around a coherent academic purpose and may draw together the academic resources of a number of departments and schools. The program’s purpose may include topical, period, or area studies, and must be consistent with the philosophy underlying a liberal arts education (See “What Is Liberal Education?” on page 72 of this catalog). The program should not be designed with a focus on pre-professional training (e.g., pre-business, pre-law, or pre-medicine). The student may be required to achieve a standard of proficiency in appropriately related areas such as foreign languages or mathematics in addition to the 48 credit hours constituting the program of concentration. A student who wants to develop such a program must first discuss it with a dean.

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discipline. The student must achieve at least a 2.000 grade point average in all courses that are (or have been) part of the contract.

I hope this is clear. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

Tim

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B. Proposed revision of the “Individually Designed Interdisciplinary Majors” program. Dean Campbell explained, in response to questions from Council members, that the number of students who have established an individually designed major (INOT) has increased rapidly in the last few years and an increasing number of these INOTs are business oriented. The INOT option has been available for a considerable number of years, she continued, and some INOT contracts are marvelous, those individually designed interdisciplinary majors that focus on a significant liberal arts subject not covered by an existing Arts and Science major and that draw from many academic programs. Yet, many of the business- or other pre-professional-oriented INOT majors do not satisfy these criteria and some INOT students are advised by adjunct or part-time faculty members, not full-time faculty members. The CASP recommendations attempt to clarify the purpose of the INOT program and the criteria of an appropriate INOT major. Some administrative changes to this effect have been made by the Committee on Individual Programs (CIP). The CIP, for instance, has rejected INOT proposals that are too narrow, do not have a coherent rationale, or have not included relevant and important courses. Dean Campbell also emphasized that faculty members are not required to be an INOT adviser if a student makes such a request.

Professor Rogaski expressed concern, through an email message presented by Professor Outlaw, that the proposed changes to the Catalog language recommended by CASP are not sufficient; it is unlikely that adding one line to the Catalog stating that INOT majors should not be pre-professional is going to be effective. Professor Crawford agreed with Professor Rogaski’s point and stated that another sentence is needed, a positive statement about what an INOT major should be. Council members suggested that the new explicit statement should read something like: “The INOT major should be consistent with the aims or purpose of a liberal arts education” using the resources available in the College of Arts and Science. The new sentence could be placed immediately after the sentence ending in “area studies” and could refer to another section of the Catalog or to an AXLE booklet for a definition or description of “liberal arts education.” Such a sentence would provide guidance and serve as a reminder to students, faculty members, and the CIP about the purpose of the INOT program. After a brief discussion about the wording of the additional sentence, Council approved a motion to send the proposal back to CASP in order for that committee to consider these concerns and propose new language along the lines noted above.
Dear Jonathan and Lou,

Last week, CASP met and decided on two changes that I believe need to go before the Faculty Council for its deliberation. They are as follows:

1) GPAs for students in the Honors Programs

We agreed that the minimum GPA for departmental honors be raised from the current 3.0 to 3.3. (This is only a minimum; many departments have already set higher levels, and the right of a student who does not meet the minimum grade level to petition for special consideration has not changed.)

Consequently, on page 94 of the Catalog, under "Departmental Honors", the current statement:

Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.000 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study.

is to be changed to:

Students normally begin departmental honors work in the junior year, but exceptions may be made in the case of outstanding seniors. To qualify for consideration, students must have (a) attained a minimum grade point average of 3.300 in all work previously taken for credit and in the program of concentration, and (b) exhibited to the department(s) concerned such
other evidence as may be required to indicate a capacity for independent study.

2) In an attempt to discourage business-oriented and similar pre-professional independent study programs, the following changes are to be made to the Catalog:

(a) On page 88, under “Individually Designed Interdisciplinary Majors”, after the sentence “The program’s purpose may include topical, period, or area studies.”, the following sentence is to be inserted: “The program should not be designed with a focus on pre-professional training (e.g., pre-business, pre-law, or pre-medicine).

(b) The last sentence of the paragraph, i.e., “A student who wants to develop such a program must first discuss it with a dean.” is to be deleted.

(c) A new paragraph is to be inserted after the first, reading as follows:

“Each student must identify a major adviser who will offer advice and guidance. The major adviser must be a full-time faculty member or senior lecturer.”

Please let me know if you need any clarifications or additional information about these proposed changes.

Thanks,

Tim

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***************************************************************************
Hello Jonathan,

As for the GPA requirement, as you say, it is fairly obvious why it is needed. Members of the FC might be interested to know that the 3.00 number was set when the college first transitioned to the 4.0 grading system, sometime in the early 1980’s (before my time here, so I don’t know the exact year). The (unfortunate) grade inflation and the (fortunate) rise in quality of students in the ensuing 30+ years has made the adjustment in the requirement for admission to honors necessary (and overdue, which is why many departments have raised it on their own).

The rise of the individually-designed interdisciplinary major (INOTs) over the past 10 years has been dramatic: in 2004, there were only 27 such majors; in 2013, there were 77 INOTs, equal to those in English. Although there have been some truly well-designed examples, most are narrowly focused on pre-professional topics such as business, management, entrepreneurship, and the like. These not only create some conflict with offerings from Owen, but also fail to capture what is to be the truly interdisciplinary nature of such majors. This is not to say that courses from a variety of departments aren’t required—they are—but they are still selected to facilitate a narrowly conceived goal (e.g., entrance into a professional school), rather than to explore the intersection of disparate worlds of thought. The change in language is to reemphasize the interdisciplinary nature of INOTs, encourage students to take more responsibility for designing a coherent proposal, and give some guidance to the advisers and approvers of such majors.

We considered other qualifiers other than “should”, and decided not to be too restrictive (e.g., with “must”), because we felt that it might be possible for a student to come up with an appropriate business-oriented INOT, for example, that was not simply focused on making the student more attractive to post-graduate business schools. We felt that the bar should be raised on what constituted an acceptable INOT, however. A Vanderbilt student has over 50 majors to choose from, and there should be some very good reasons presented if a custom-designed major is contemplated.

I hope this helps. Let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Thanks,

Tim

On Mar 26, 2014, at 3:13 PM, Bremer, Jonathan E <jonathan.e.bremer@Vanderbilt.Edu> wrote:

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are published elsewhere in this catalog or otherwise available to students.

Academic programs of the College of Arts and Science are varied and broad in scope, with majors offered in the following fields:

- Anthropology
- Art
- Biological Sciences
- Chemistry
- Classical Civilization
- Classical Languages
- Classics
- Communication Studies
- Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology
- Economics
- English
- French
- German
- History
- History of Art
- Mathematics
- Molecular and Cellular Biology
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Religious Studies
- Russian
- Sociology
- Spanish
- Spanish and Portuguese
- Theatre

Approved Second Majors Outside the College

All undergraduate courses, majors, and minors offered by Blair School of Music, School of Engineering, and Peabody College are approved for students in the College of Arts and Science. See the appropriate sections of the Undergraduate Catalog under each school for details. Arts and Science students with a second major from another Vanderbilt undergraduate school must earn a minimum of 90 semester hours in Arts and Science. Consultation with the student’s Arts and Science academic adviser is especially important.

Declaration of the Area of Concentration

Students may formally declare a major at any time during the third semester of residence and must do so no later than the Friday before Spring Break of the fourth semester. The student selects a department or interdisciplinary program and applies to that department or program for assignment to an adviser. Students who wish to develop an individually designed interdisciplinary program apply to the associate dean who chairs the Committee on Individual Programs.

Each fall a program is arranged that provides for consultation of sophomores with department chairs, for the purpose of helping students select a major. Sophomore students who have not declared a major should participate in this program if they intend to attain junior standing before the next spring.

The selection of a major is of considerable importance, and the entire program of concentration for the junior and senior years should be planned with the major adviser before the beginning of the junior year. Students officially declare their majors by registering with the chosen department(s) or interdisciplinary program(s), and with the Arts and Science Registrar’s Office. When the student’s major has been registered, access to the student’s academic record is transferred from the pre-major adviser to the new major adviser.

Students may major in one of the defined interdisciplinary programs listed below. There shall not be fewer than 27 hours in the major field, but a given program may require up to 48 hours. The student must achieve at least a 2.000 average in all work taken in the major.

Defined Interdisciplinary Programs:
- African American and Diaspora Studies
- American Studies
- Asian Studies
- Communication of Science and Technology
- Economics and History
- European Studies
- Film Studies
- French and European Studies
- German and European Studies
- Italian and European Studies
- Jewish Studies
- Latin American Studies
- Latino and Latina Studies
- Medicine, Health, and Society
- Neuroscience
- Public Policy Studies
- Russian and European Studies
- Spanish and European Studies
- Spanish, Portuguese, and European Studies
- Women’s and Gender Studies

Students may combine an interdisciplinary major with a major in one of the recognized fields listed at the beginning of this chapter. Upon approval of the Committee on Individual Programs and the student’s adviser, (a) as many as 6 hours may be counted as part of both the interdisciplinary major and the second major, or (b) normally, no more than three introductory-level courses will be counted toward the interdisciplinary major.

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Double and Triple Majors

This program permits a student to concentrate in two or three fields, which may or may not be intellectually related. With approval of the departments concerned, the student completes all of the requirements stipulated for the majors. Triple majors require approval of the Administrative Committee.

Each A&S non-interdisciplinary major must include at least 24 credit hours that are being counted solely toward the major. It should be noted that adoption of this rule would apply also to the non-interdisciplinary major for those students who combine such a major with an interdisciplinary major.