

**Improving student learning and student retention at the undergraduate level  
Application Cover Sheet**

*Maximum funding for any single grant: \$50,000.  
Proposal must be limited to two pages plus a budget page, in addition to the cover sheet.*

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Complete cover sheet
2. Attach 2 page proposal summary
3. Attach 1 page budget
4. Submit your proposal electronically to your college office for approval. College offices will submit recommended college proposals to the Provost office **no later than June 23, 2006 for FY'07 funding.**

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**Date:** 6/22/2006

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**Title of Your Proposal:** The Major Matters Program: Introduction to the Major

**Theme of Your Proposal:** Enhancing advisement and support for students

**College rating**     **APPROVED**

## **MAJOR MATTERS PROGRAM: INTRODUCTION TO THE MAJOR**

### **College of Arts and Sciences**

#### **Purpose:**

Each year, approximately 9,000 of Georgia State's undergraduate students are enrolled in one of the 30 undergraduate majors in the College of Arts and Sciences. Currently, students must declare a major before they earn 42 credit hours, and it has been proposed that they make this decision within one year of entry. Unfortunately, students often make this initial selection of a major without sufficient information about the implications of their choice. Although the college's Office of Academic Assistance and Arts and Sciences departments provide an extensive advisement structure for students once they have declared a major, there is a clear need to develop college-level programs that inform undeclared students about the choices available to them and about the requirements associated with each major.

There are a multitude of reasons why students linger in degree programs or leave the university before graduation, yet we believe that the **Major Matters Program** can mitigate such problems and enhance the university's retention, progression, and graduation rates by addressing students' concerns for *destination*, and by helping them to map efficient, yet meaningful, routes to graduation and success. The program will provide sophomores with *orientations* that will facilitate an informed selection of a major; with *guides*, or successful students who, along with college advisors and faculty, can help them chart a sure course through a major; and with *maps* that, in addition to existing support materials, will help them chart an efficient course through the major's curriculum and gain an initial sense of where it can lead them after graduation.

#### **Goals:**

The overarching goal of the Major Matters program is to provide students with a college-level advisement experience that accomplishes the following:

1. provides undeclared students with access to information about various majors,
2. guides selection of the major that best matches their interests and talents,
3. provides them with maps for majors with clear milestones and timetable, and
4. offers them an image of likely destinations that will motivate timely progress to graduation.

Although our target audience will be sophomores, the program will be open to all students who are seeking advice about the selection of a major.

#### **Project Activities:**

In order to accomplish the above goals, the college will engage in three complementary activities:

- form teams of faculty and staff advisors and successful students for each major to provide information and guidance for undeclared students,
- design a series of workshops that orient sophomores and others to a cluster of majors, and
- develop highly accessible print and electronic materials that chart milestones, efficient routes, and special opportunities in each major and work in conjunction with existing support resources.

The college will take the following steps to implement these activities:

**1. Plan Major Matters Workshops:** An essential component of the program will be organizing integrated group-advisement **Major Matters orientation workshops** focused on clusters of majors. During these sessions, students will have the opportunity to meet with members of the advisement team for a set of related majors, discuss career-related issues, and explore academic issues important to them. In order to plan these workshops and other Major Matters activities strategically, the college will bring various groups of faculty, staff, and students together during fall 2006, to discuss the problems associated with declaring a major.

As a first step, the college will organize several undergraduate student focus groups to gather information about the major-declaration process. The college will next hold a mini-retreat for the Undergraduate Council, which includes faculty members from each department, associate deans, advisors, and undergraduate students, to discuss the focus group results and related data and begin planning the Major Matters activities. After the retreat, a planning group drawn from retreat participants and others will be charged with developing workshops and materials. A staff member in the Office of Academic Assistance will be hired as **Major Matters coordinator** to enact the recommendations of the planning group.

**2. Train Teams of Major Guides:** The college will hire 12 outstanding juniors and seniors, drawn from all areas of the college as **major guides**. Major guides will provide support services for students who may appreciate having the option of discussing concerns with other students. In interactions with students, guides will discuss academic issues, university rules and regulations, and student responsibilities.

These students will initially participate in and facilitate focus groups and assist in the design of workshops and maps. The Major Matters coordinator will supervise the activities of guides and will ensure these students have a sound understanding of the requirements and opportunities associated with their particular major. After this training, guides will serve as resources and role models both for undeclared students and for new majors.

**3. Launch Major Matters Workshops:** After the planning activities in the fall, Major Matters workshops will be scheduled weekly beginning spring 2007. They will be conducted by faculty and staff advisors and student guides from the appropriate major. Although the specific content of each major workshop will be determined in the fall, they will likely include presentations by the organizers and others (e.g., faculty experts, professionals, and student organization representatives), group sessions with major guides, and the distribution of resource materials. Workshops will be promoted through faculty and major guide announcements during classes, web and email announcements, flyers, and ads in the *Signal*.

**4. Produce and Distribute Major Maps:** Each of the groups that gather in fall 2006 will be asked the question, "What would we include on a map for this major?" Staff in the college Media Services office will work with the Major Matters coordinator and guides to create a detailed, visual map of successful routes through each major. The maps will include essential information, such as required course progressions and curricular choices, and will also point students toward related student organizations, study abroad and exchange opportunities, and career destinations. A print version of the maps will be made available at workshops, in the Office of Academic Assistance, in departments, and on the web. A **Major Matters website** will be developed to provide access to these and other resource materials, and to serve as an information center for workshops and other program activities. The site will include links to relevant university advisement and career planning services.

#### **Evaluation:**

1. Track attendance at workshops and ask attendees to complete a brief evaluation at the end of the session. The survey will be designed to provide information on both student satisfaction and areas for improvement.
2. Include feedback instructions on major maps and a mechanism for making suggestions on the program website. These prompts will direct students to provide specific input about the contents of maps as well as about the program in general.
3. Conduct survey of major guides at the end of the year to assess their satisfaction with training, resource materials, workshops, and student interaction.
4. Monitor major declaration rates in relation to workshops held, number of maps distributed, and website visits.
5. Convene the Undergraduate Council planning group, advisors, and others in summer 2007 to examine evaluation data and modify workshops and maps accordingly for 2007-08.

**Budget:**

**Connection to Goals:** As described above, the orientation workshops will be the primary means of achieving the goals of the Major Matters program. The costs relating to the coordinator, guides, and maps will be in support of the workshops.

Major Matters Coordinator position :	\$40,000
College cost share for Coordinator:	(\$20,000)
12 Major Guides @ \$2,000 each:	\$24,000
Materials, including production of Major Maps:	\$6,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>