Example of a previous proposal

Maeve White
Independent Major Proposal: Film and Media Studies

In high school, I took a two-year IB film studies course that changed my life. I had always loved movies, of course, and I had studied them both critically and through production in middle school, but I did not think of them as anything I was particularly interested in. As I spent my final two years of high school studying, creating, and growing to understand films, I knew that my life would need to involve the movies. Right now, I cannot say for sure what I plan to do with my life—make documentaries, procure a PhD in anthropology, teach film studies overseas, work in museums as a liaison between the anthropological and the media departments—but I can say that whatever I do will involve film to some degree.

I have already declared a major in anthropology, so I am often asked what these two fields have to do with each other, how I might use them “in the real world,” and why I would set myself the challenge of pursuing an independent major alongside an already-established one. In short, I will say that my passion for the two subjects is equal and it would be dishonest to choose one over the other, I have countless ideas for how to translate them into “the real world” (as I have already expounded upon), and that anthropology and film studies have absolutely everything to do with each other. It is often said that movies are a universal language, that they cross boundaries more easily than any other human communicative endeavor, and that they are the most effective way that human beings can understand each other. While I agree with these concepts to a certain degree, I also think that they oversimplify the vast differences evident in filmic conventions across cultures. Film has been used to express, repress, revolt, conceal, reveal, dictate, question, challenge, comply, and so much more. It is inextricably linked to anthropology through the history of the documentary but also because anthropology studies
culture through its practices as well as its products—and films are both practices and products of culture.

Film studies is already an interdisciplinary program, drawing from English and art history as well as the social sciences and the many cultural studies programs here at Bryn Mawr. I am also interested in exploring the production side of film and media studies because my past experiences have shown me that understanding the creation process is invaluable to understanding the final product. I will take full advantage of the variety of courses offered through the Tri-co, selecting from the various fine arts, video production, and film and media studies courses available in the area. There will be areas of minor overlap with my preexisting anthropology major, but I will limit these as much as possible so as to provide myself with the most diversified academic experience possible.

In my opinion, it would be remarkably simple to write a single thesis to satisfy both of my majors. However, in the case that this is unacceptable to either department, I am prepared to take on the challenge of creating two separate final works. For this film and media studies major, I envision as a capstone project a thesis in the form of a documentary script. The style of documentary would be an educational, found-footage piece that would elaborate on film analysis and could be used in a classroom. I would not actually create the documentary, but would have to effectively present my ideas and findings visually (detailing the images I would put on the screen) and aurally (writing the analysis as narration/dialogue) at the same time. One of my interests in film and media studies is the non-narrative, avant-garde, and “arthouse” cinema that challenges the conventions of mainstream documentary and narrative films. I could undertake an analysis of films like *Der lauf der dinge* (Fischli and Weiss, 1997, Germany) and *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2002, Russia) to explore the ways that single takes (or the appearance of a singular take) create meaning for viewers. Alternatively, I could explore the cult movie phenomenon and
culture, taking an anthropologically informed perspective of films like *Troll 2* (Fragasso, 1990, US) and *The Room* (Wiseau, 2003, US) to see how objectively terrible films can achieve cult status. These topics would be presented in a documentary script of 30 or 60 pages (the equivalent of 30 or 60 minutes of screen time, depending on agreements with my advisers), forcing me to balance academic exploration with engaging presentation.

Movies ignite something in all of us that demands engagement. While I do not necessarily envision myself in a production-centric career, I believe that film studies and film production must be understood and appreciated in equal measure in order to truly grasp the importance and the effects of cinema. At the risk of sounding dramatic, film is essential to my life. I attended a humanities and communications magnet program for middle school where I first gained an appreciation for the combination of media studies with my other courses. In addition to taking a film history elective, in my required media course each year I created multiple kinds of animated films, played every role in the production of a talk show, created three documentaries, and experimented with narrative film. In high school, I took photography courses, gaining a better understanding of the camera and the image. I attended Sundance Film Festival with my film class and began to comprehend the film studies world as it exists outside of academia and production. I also worked in varying capacities on numerous narrative shorts, a mockumentary, two non-narrative poetic pieces, sound editing, and other projects. I even wrote a documentary script treating a feminist analysis of film history (specifically the femme fatale), so my thesis project is not merely a whimsical project I won’t actually know how to do. I have an extensive background in and passion for the cinema. I hope that this major will allow me to pry open the academic film world as I progress towards a comprehensive understanding of film and media in a way that will complement and augment my studies in anthropology.