

Advising for STS Degrees

Frequently Asked Questions

Spring 2017 is the first semester that we'll be signing people up for the STS co-major and STS minor in significant numbers. Here is some basic information about how that works. You are receiving this because we have you recorded as Core Faculty for the program.

Q: What is a co-major?

A: This is synonymous with "second major" but sounds perhaps a little nicer. It's a major that you can't hold alone but only in combination with at least one more. Other co-majors include Environmental Studies, Biotechnology, Education, etc. There are no restrictions on the other major. (There used to be a rule that said you couldn't have two co-majors together, but apparently that is defunct. We will need to test that when a student is ready to try it.)

Q: What kinds of STS courses are there?

A: Most of the courses that count towards our degree are run by other departments and programs. We cross-count them but don't necessarily cross-list them. You can see an up-to-date list of pre-approved STS courses on our website (and it also appears on the checklists for the major and minor). There are two other ways to count classes towards the degree: (1) via STS 10 (the "Reading Lab," described further below), which makes certain "paired" classes count; and (2) by petition. Petitions can be launched by the student or the advisor, via email to sts@tufts.edu.

Pre-approved courses have been assigned some subset of the five following attributes.

Core STS: regularly offered, using the STS literature deeply

Bodies, Health, and Medicine

Science and the State

Mathematics and Modeling

General STS: survey courses and/or clear STS courses not fitted to a track

Q: How do the tracks work?

A: They're supposed to serve a few purposes at once: communication to students about what STS encompasses; a way to "curate" classes into a coherent course of study; and an advising tool for helping make sure the majors are getting a bit of breadth. It is not required for students to pick a track. If they opt not to, then it's the advisor's job to help them think about coherence and breadth.

Q: What are the major requirements?

A: It is a ten-course major. There are five slots for "fundamental" courses, which would ordinarily list the first five taken toward the degree. Two of the five must be Core, and among all five they should cover three of the four other attributes. In practice, this should not be hard to do from our course list. Then two more courses within a chosen track of study (or by advisor's discretion if no track is chosen) and finally any three additional courses.

Just as there is a petition process to get courses to count at all, students can also petition to add attributes; a successful attribute petition might rest on the choice of topic for a paper or project.

Q: What are the minor requirements?

A: It is a six-course minor. The six courses must include two Core and among them possess two of the four other attributes.

Q: What is a Reading Lab?

A: STS 10 is a 0.5-credit course we hope to offer in one or two sections each semester. It is a one-hour-per-week format with about 30 pages of weekly reading and no writing assignments—it's purely discussion-based. These are intended to pair with courses in other departments that have STS tie-ins but that are not themselves STS courses. On the syllabus of each Reading Lab, the instructor will list courses that are pre-approved to pair with the Lab. As for all other aspects of the degree, students can also petition to count other classes with the labs.

So far, we have developed the following Reading Labs:

Models — pairs with mathematical modeling courses

Energy — pairs with many physics and engineering classes and some political science

Equity — pairs with science education classes

Life — pairs with biology classes

A lab plus its paired class are entered as 1.5 credits in the checklist and have automatic Core status. Other attributes vary by semester and are listed on the Lab syllabi.

Q: What is the protocol for signing up for the degrees?

A: We have major and minor checklists online, and they list pre-approved classes and their attributes. We suggest that you sit down and fill one out in a speculative, general way with a student who's potentially interested—the form doesn't have to be filed anywhere at that point, but it's helpful for the student to see how the degree might play out. We also have a major declaration form. That one does have to be sent to Dowling. We ask that you scan a copy to sts@tufts.edu before the student hands it in.