Duke University's Program II was conceived in 1968 to provide students in Trinity College the option to design their own degree program. As such it complements the majors offered under Program I, serving the needs of students whose intellectual interests cross departmental boundaries or who perceive areas of learning in clusters other than those offered in majors available in Program I.

The Program II application requires clear, concise, and compelling writing. To increase the likelihood of having your Program II application accepted, you must plan carefully and allot ample time to write your application. This handout discusses both general strategies for writing your application and specific tips for preparing the strongest Program II application possible.

General Strategies

Review the application instructions carefully and be sure to follow the prompts. In particular, you should focus on the *intellectual value* of your proposed program and your learning objectives and not specifically on your professional goals. Your time in the academic program at Duke should not merely be a means to an end but add to your intellectual and personal growth and understanding.

Aim to write a compelling, confident, vigorous, and "doable" application. This means that you should follow these guidelines:

1. Share your intellectual interests.
2. Argue persuasively for why Program II is the best option for satisfying these interests.
3. Convey your intellectual journey and who you are.
4. Explain how each proposed course contributes to your theme and how individually and together they form a coherent body of work that will enable you to achieve your learning objectives.
5. Demonstrate your commitment to your program and its intellectual goals.

Convey clearly *why* it is important to study your proposed program. Stating that no one else studies your field, for example, is not particularly compelling. Rather, explain its importance by working with big ideas, drawing connections, and engaging with culturally relevant research questions.

Think of your proposed program as a mosaic. Share your vision with the reader by not only describing the mosaic as a whole but also by sharing how the pieces of glass are put together, how they relate to each other, and also how each piece stands on its own.

Read the sample essays on the Program II website to see examples of successful applications. These are just samples, but take note of *how* the writers organize and present their thoughts.

Allot plenty of time for writing and revising your application essay. Key phases of the writing process are *brainstorming/prewriting*, *drafting*, *revising*, and *proofreading*. Do not underestimate the time it will take for each of these stages; you will probably have to do each stage multiple times.

Even though Program II is designed to adapt to each individual's intellectual interests, do not think of the application as a solitary endeavor. Plan to get feedback from others, including your advisor, other

professors, and Writing Studio tutors. All writing can benefit from an outsider reader's feedback. Should you desire to make an appointment with the Writing Studio, schedule a face-to-face appointment and start well before the final Program II application deadline. Include a brainstorming tutoring session as well as a session (or sessions) to review your drafted essay.

Specific Tips

Perhaps, above all else, your application must demonstrate Program II is the *only* option that will enable you to pursue your intellectual interests. This fact should guide you as you craft your application. To that end, your application must have a clearly defined and focused theme. If you are unable to conceptualize this theme or communicate it clearly, consider meeting with your Program II advisor and Dean Keul. With their supportive assistance you will be able to develop your ideas and think through them.

Your application is not the place to ramble about your life history or how you became interested in a topic that is marginally related to your proposed field of study. Instead you should consider the following:

- Communicate your intellectual journey and learning objectives. How did you become interested in your field? What are the core questions you seek to explore during your time at Duke? Where do you want to be at the end of the journey? Why and how are you going to get there? How have your interests grown over time? What is the common denominator that unites your selection of courses? What do you hope to understand better?
- Think of the evaluating committee as educated outsiders who are unfamiliar with your field. Guide the reader through your program carefully. Write clearly, using specific language that is also understandable to a layperson. Try to avoid jargon, but if you must use it then explain its meaning. Before explaining each individual course that you propose to include in Program II, spend several paragraphs discussing the intellectual questions that drive your proposed program of study. These should not be yes/no questions but rather open ended but specific ones. Consider using headings to help guide the reader.
- Do not propose to take too many classes (for example, six or seven) from the same department. Doing so will encourage a reader to think you could major in that field. Your application should clearly demonstrate that a major in Program I cannot adequately address your research inquiries and make clear what is gained by your participation in Program II.

Useful Resources

Before beginning your application, make sure you are familiar with the policies and requirements of Duke's Program II.

You may also want to review the Duke Writing Studio handouts on Prewriting, Brainstorming Maps, Roadmapping, and Reverse Outlining.

Life after Program II

To find out more about how Program II can open up exciting new career paths, check out the testimonials from Program II alumni: Life after Program II.