

Dual Concentrations in Strategic Studies

Eliot A. Cohen, Director of Strategic Studies

1. There are no dual concentrations in Strategic Studies. By this I mean concentration in, say, Strategic Studies and regional area such as European and Eurasian Studies, or a policy area such as International Development. This, of course, has nothing to do with the economics requirement that falls on all MA students at SAIS.

2. Academically, allowing dual concentrations leads, in practice, to students picking courses not because they fit their interests or educational needs, but in order to accommodate a schedule already made complicated by SAIS requirements. Conversely, I have yet to find a student unable to explore other fields, to include regional studies, because they are not dual concentrators. Ultimately, students do best to have a concentration and take courses in other fields as well, allowing themselves room to explore topics or areas that might not fit the straitjacket created by a dual concentration. I believe that allowing dual concentrations—which students sometimes believe will look good on resumes—creates a kind of moral hazard for the program in effectively encouraging academic behavior that is educationally unsound. One further and far from minor point: dual concentrators may have oral honors exams with three examiners, which undercuts the value of that event considerably.

3. Administratively, dual concentrations create a burden on this program in particular, which is one of the largest in the school. Quite apart from the tasks involved in keeping track of the large number of students who would like “Strategic Studies” as well as something else on their resume, it poses a problem of equity. Part of the Strategic Studies experience consists of special events – staff rides and the like – which have limited slots available. We also have limited fellowship and internship funds. I am reluctant to create a situation in which a student can, in effect, double dip into the scarce resources of two programs or, conversely, in which there are two classes of program citizen, as it were, concentrators and dual concentrators.

4. This policy has been discussed and approved by the Academic Board. I will make no exceptions to it.