

Office of the Chancellor
Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
Procedures and Standards for University Operations

Procedure/Standard Number 2012-13
Academic Degrees

Approved by:  Date: February 20, 2012

History:

Revised --

Additional History--

Related Policies, Procedures or Standards: [Board of Governors' Policy 1990-06-A: Academic Degrees](#)

Key Words/Categories:

Additional References:

I. Introduction

The System Standards and Procedures serve to interpret and clarify the policy on Academic Degrees for State System universities. The System Standards and Procedures are designed to further define or explain the policy, not to impose any new requirements that are not otherwise set forth in the policy.

II. Definitions

A. In regard to the definition of "Baccalaureate Degrees", and per the policy (page 2), "Baccalaureate degrees consist of two principal components, general education and study in depth in a major." The interpretation of this policy statement is that the "two principal components, general education and study in depth in a major" do not preclude other components, such as "university requirements" or "degree requirements." Definitions for the terms "university requirement" and "degree requirement" are as follows:

1. **University Requirement:** University requirements are course(s) or competencies that are required for all major academic programs across the university, that are not otherwise a part of the general education program.

An example of a "university requirement" is:

Computer Competency Requirement: The goal of the computer competency requirement is to ensure that students can effectively use computers and technology to succeed in information based society. The purpose of the competency test is to determine if new students have already acquired the faculty-designated minimum level of computer competence. The topics on which students will be tested are computer hardware, system software, application software, social impact, technology and the web, networks and security and privacy. We believe that students need to have a minimum level of competence to achieve the greatest success during their academic career. Students can demonstrate computer competency by either passing the computer competency exam or passing a one credit CPSC100, Introduction to Computing for Liberal Arts or any of the following three-credit courses: CPSC110 (Computer Concepts), CPSC130 (Introduction to Information Systems) or CPSC210 (Productivity Software). Upon the successful completion of the exam or one of the courses, the university will certify graduates as having achieved a minimum level of computer competency. Some departments may require students to take additional courses to achieve computer competency for a specific academic major.

2. **Degree Requirement:** A degree requirement is a requirement for all academic majors or major programs of study with a specific degree designation (i.e., BA, BS, etc.). Examples of a "degree requirement" are:

University-Approved Minor Requirement for the BA Degree: All BA degree candidates must successfully complete a university-approved minor, in a discipline or field different from the major program of study.

Modern Language Requirement for the BA Degree: All BA degree candidates must successfully complete a modern language requirement, defined as completion of three courses in one modern language (e.g. Chinese I, Chinese II, Chinese II) with a course grade of C or higher. Modern language courses/credits used to fulfill the degree requirement may not be counted to fulfill general education requirements or requirements for the major. (**Note:** If some, but not all majors with a BA degree designation at a university require a modern language sequence, then the modern language course/credits will not count in the major requirements.)

- B. In regard to "Baccalaureate Degrees," specifically the description of "general education," and per the policy (page 2), "Certain majors have specific requirements prescribed by external agencies that may pertain to general education requirements." The interpretation of this policy statement is that certain majors may "prescribe" or "direct" specific general education requirements when directed by accrediting bodies or by best practice in the

discipline. Definitions of "directed general education" or "prescribed general education" requirements are as follows:

1. **Directed General Education (Prescribed General Education):** General education courses that are "required for the major" are considered "directed general education" or "prescribed general education". Therefore, directed (prescribed) general education courses are counted in the general education requirement/credits. As such, they would not be counted in courses/credits for the major requirements.

Examples of a "directed general education" requirement are:

Example 1: The academic preparation of all applicants for admission to initial preparation programs which culminate in a bachelor's degree shall include at least 6 semester hour credits (or the equivalent) in college level mathematics and at least 6 semester hour credits (or the equivalent) in college level English composition and literature. If the designated college level mathematics courses, English composition course, and literature course meet general education requirements, then they are considered "directed general education" and are not placed or counted in the requirements for the major.

Example 2: The program of study for a nursing major requires Anatomy and Physiology I. If the Anatomy and Physiology I course meets a general education requirement, then it is a "directed general education" course. As such, it is counted toward the general education requirements and not in the requirements for the major. However, if the Anatomy and Physiology course is not counted or considered to meet a general education requirement, then it may be considered a "cognate course" in the requirements for the major.

- C. In regard to "Baccalaureate Degrees," specifically the descriptions of the Bachelor of Art (BA) and Bachelor of Science (BS), and per the policy (page 3), the major program comprises "courses required by the major, including required cognate courses in related disciplines." A definition for the term "cognate" is as follows:

1. **Cognate Courses:** Cognate courses are those that are in a discipline or field of study different from the primary discipline of the major (i.e., as determined by the primary course code or prefix, or home department), but are considered essential to the major requirements for the program of study. (Such courses required for the major but also counting for general education do not contribute toward the maximum number of credits permitted for the B.A. or B.S. degrees.)

Foreign Language courses that are required for a degree or required for the major are not considered cognate courses.

An example of a “cognate course” requirement is:

Example 1: A university offers a BS, Computer Science. The curriculum for the degree (BS) and major (Computer Science) requires a core of Computer Science (CSCI) courses. However, the requirements for the major also include courses from related or connected disciplines, specifically, mathematics (MATH) and philosophy (PHIL). In this example, the MATH and PHIL courses would be cognate courses within the major. (Note, if the MATH and PHIL are counted in the general education requirements, then they would be considered directed general education courses and not counted in the major requirements as cognates.)

D. In regard to “Baccalaureate Degrees,” specifically the “remainder of the curriculum,” and per the policy (page 2), the “curriculum may consist of coursework related to the major, advanced coursework in the liberal arts and sciences, or electives.” The definition of “electives” or “free electives” is as follows:

1. **Electives (Free electives):** Courses that do not count toward the: (a.) general education component, (b.) requirements for a major (including cognate courses), (c.) university requirements, or (d.) degree requirements, are referred to as electives or free electives. While certain courses may be recommended or suggested to students in a major as being beneficial or desirable, students are to remain “free” to take courses of their choice, whether or not such courses are courses related to the major, advanced coursework in the liberal arts and sciences, courses for a minor, or totally free electives.

Note: In summary, one cannot determine, solely by looking at a particular course, whether it is counted in the credits for the general education component, major requirements (including cognate), a degree requirement, a university requirement, or an elective. One must look at the overall program of study for the major to determine how courses are organized into the different components, or which requirements they fulfill.

E. In regard to the definition of “**Master’s Degrees**”, and per the policy (page 4), “At least 50 percent of **coursework** (excluding thesis, research or internship hours) to complete a master’s degree must be identified as **primarily directed at graduate students with the majority of students in the course obtaining graduate credits.**”

The interpretation of this policy statement is that the term “majority” is intended to be that the “supermajority” (e.g., exceeds simple majority of over 50%) of students “over time” (i.e., 5-year program review cycle) are to

be graduate students. Moreover, the focus is to be on the academic integrity of the graduate course, evidenced by factors such as the graduate course syllabus (i.e., distinct graduate-level student learning outcomes, course requirements, etc., that are qualitatively and quantitatively graduate in nature; qualifications for faculty who teach graduate level courses, etc.).

III. Implementation

In regard to the **"Implementation" timeline**, and per the policy (page 5), " all previously approved programs must be in such compliance by conclusion of the next program review cycle or external program accreditation review after July 1, 2012, with all programs in compliance by August 1, 2015."

The interpretation of this policy statement is that the intent is to allow for a transition period for all programs to be fully in compliance. Therefore, "the next program review cycle after July 1, 2012," is further defined as program review reports to be conducted during 2012–2013 academic year, with reports submitted to the Office of the Chancellor by August 15, 2013.