

UWSP Degree Definitions

Background

The General Education Program Review Committee (GEPRC) initially proposed that the definitions of and requirements for the 4 degree types (B.A., B.S., B.M., B.F.A.) be left up to individual departments. The campus community responded, however, that it preferred to maintain separate university-level definitions/requirements to distinguish the degree types. The GEPRC therefore recommended that the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) develop the degree definitions/requirements and in April 2009, Faculty Senate approved this recommendation and gave the AAC its charge.

Current Degree Definitions

The current degree definitions are defined as follows on p. 13 of the UWSP Course Catalog:

Note that you meet different requirements for different degrees. In working toward a B.A. you emphasize foreign languages, the humanities, and history. In working toward a B.S. you concentrate more on mathematics and the natural sciences. And in working toward a BM or BFA, you study a range of subjects that complement the curriculum in your major field.

There is no definition for the A.D. What follows these statements is simply a list of General Degree Requirement courses for each of the degree types. The degree type is basically “defined” by the GDR course list.

Except for a few, most majors can follow either degree type, although it may be more efficient to choose one over the other given the major requirements. Many high credit majors have embedded the degree requirements/GDRS into their major requirements. For those majors, students usually choose the degree type that is most efficient, i.e. has the greatest overlap between degree requirements and major requirements. For other majors where there is relatively little overlap, some students may choose a degree type with post-graduate preparation in mind; others typically choose a degree type based on their skills and interests.

Because of its lack of intentional cohesion, the assessment of the degree requirements/GDRs has not been very successful.

Proposed Degree Definitions

After examining numerous college degree definitions across the nation, the AAC determined that there is no standard definition of the various degree types offered in the U.S. Each institution defines them differently. Some institutions only offer a B.A. for all majors, defining it as a liberal arts degree. Others define the B.S. as a degree for applied majors. We found examples of institutions where the degree types are defined at the university, college and department level.

Faculty Senate directed that UWSP’s degree definitions be determined at the university-level. With broad university-level definitions to serve as general guidelines, this proposal seeks to put the implementation of the degree requirements into the hands of individual departments. Departments would have both the right and the responsibility of choosing the degree type or types that most closely corresponds with their own academic mission. If a department offers more than one degree program, with substantially different goals and departmental requirements from each other, then the department may also opt to distinguish between these tracks by defining them as different degree types. This is not necessary, however, i.e., a department may choose to offer two substantially different tracks and still have both of them be of just one degree type. The program learning outcomes for the major are, as determined by the home department. Departmental goals determine, would drive the specific courses required for the degree requirements beyond the requirements of the General Education Program (GEP) and degree type requirements. –In addition to the General Education requirements, Departmental advising of their majors would include responsibility for

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meeting the specific Degree Requirements of their major. In other words, whereas currently the degree requirements are embedded in the GDRs, the new system would embed the degree requirements in the major.

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~~This represents a departure from UWSP's current past and present approach to degree requirements, most particularly with regard to the B.S. versus the B.A. The difference is illustrated in the enclosed file titled "Degree Requirement Options." In order to properly vet this proposal, it is crucial to understand this part, both at a practical and at a conceptual level. Currently, departments do not necessarily need to consider whether or not a BS or a B.A. most effectively achieves the program learning outcomes of a major. A department can opt to ignore the degree type altogether in designing the major. Even if a department determines that a BA or a BS is most appropriate, there is no mechanism to ensure a department is considering the learning outcomes in making that decision. There is also no mechanism to ensure that the additional GDR courses for the degree taken by the student are in support of the learning outcomes for the major. This proposal creates these mechanisms, since the department automatically plays an active, deliberate, and primary role in determining the degree type for the major. For most many departments, this will be straightforward because the learning outcomes and required courses already satisfy the broad degree guidelines proposed here. Other departments will need to evaluate their learning outcomes in the context of degree requirements. Some departments may want to offer both a BS and BA, as noted above, but there will need to be a rationale that is based upon learning outcomes.~~

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~~Admittedly, there is a potential downside to this proposal. If departments are Departments are therefore free to require whatever courses they think are in the best interests of students in their respective fields, but departments should also be careful not to be too narrow in choosing the courses that satisfy their degree requirements. For instance, if the requirement in a non-history department is "History 284", students in that major will find "History 284" to be a bottleneck, only available when that one class is offered, but if the requirement is "3 credits of [topical field] history", then students in that major will have many more options. By the same token, too tightly defined departmental requirements, it will make it difficult for a student to change majors or to double major. This danger is not new, nor is it restricted to this proposal. It has always been the case that the major requirements for one major will not automatically have any overlap whatsoever with the degree requirements for another. As ever, departments will carry the responsibility of being sensitive to this concern in designing their respective majors. This has always been the case and would continue to be the case if this proposal is implemented.~~

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Assessment of Degree Requirements would then be part of regular program assessment for each department, not requiring a separate assessment exercise.

~~It is our hope that departments will have intentional Departments will certainly want to have discussions amongst their faculty about what degree type(s) their major should offer, based on the guidelines below. Some departments may decide to only offer a B.A. or B.S.; others may decide that both degrees are appropriate in the context of program with more than one major track learning outcomes. Departments offering a B.M. or B.F.A. will also decide which other degree(s) they will offer in addition to the B.M. or B.F.A. Regardless, departments should take into consideration what courses are truly needed to supplement the courses in their major according to the new degree definitions, keeping in mind that if major collateral requirements become unnecessarily large, it could make it difficult for students to double major or change majors.~~

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The new degree definitions will go into effect with the new General Education Program and will be integrated into Ch. 7 of the University Handbook as appropriate. As ever, there will be a period of overlap between the old and new systems, as the new GEP is grandfathered in.