

Proposal to address requirements for the BA/BS and related program changes

Recognizing that:

1. Uncertainty regarding the definition of the BA and BS is a barrier to effective program planning, including for the new General Education Program;
2. For recent changes to the structure and requirements of a WOU education to succeed, adaptations will need to be made to many major and minor programs;
3. The risks and burdens of certain changes, e.g., elimination of the minor requirement, elimination of degree-specific requirements such as language study for the BA, are unevenly distributed between departments and programs;
4. Fulfillment of the WOU Strategic Plan depends on maintaining a rich variety of healthy and functional academic programs that enable Student Success and ensure Academic Excellence;

We propose:

1. The following criteria for distinguishing between BA and BS granting programs:
 - A *BA program* is one where the emphasis is on *educational breadth*. “Breadth” may be indicated by either the inherent nature of the requirements for a major or by the relative weight those requirements have in a student’s Degree Plan.
 - A major program can be considered “inherently broad” if the requirements provide students with a general education related to the relevant field, i.e., covers a broad range of content, subfields, theories, tools and/or methods. In addition, or alternatively, any program where requirements constitute 50% or less of the required 180 for graduation may also qualify to confer a BA.
 - A *BS program* is one where the emphasis is on *educational specialization*. “Specialization” may be indicated by either the inherent nature of the requirements for a major or by the relative weight those requirements have in a student’s Degree Plan.
 - A major program can be considered “inherently specialized” if the requirements provide students with a more academically or professionally focused education, i.e., covers a more delimited range of content, subfields, theories, tools and/or methods, and/or requirements are tailored to a specific set of preparations or professional accrediting standards. In addition, or alternatively, any program where requirements constitute 50% or more of the required 180 for graduation may also qualify to confer a BS.
2. That, following recommendations proffered by members of the NSM Division, (Memo of May 1, 2018), *all* departments be required to submit a notice indicating which degree or degrees will be conferred through their major programs. For any given program, faculty may indicate a particular degree, BA or BS, or alternate pathways that would allow a student to earn either a BA or a BS.

This requirement does not apply to programs that lead to a BFA, BMus, or AB.

3. That faculty be granted wide latitude for proposing changes to major and minor programs that are specifically in response to campus-wide reforms in the requirements and structure of WOU degrees.

In this case, “wide latitude” means pointing out the need to re-align specific academic programs with basic degree requirements should be a sufficient reason for a proposed change. In addition, faculty should be free to reference existing program review and assessment plans when addressing how proposed changes will be assessed.

Examples of program modifications meriting such consideration include:

- Incorporation of language study into major program requirements.
- Incorporation of a minor into major program requirements.
- Any revision intended to bring a major program in line with the proposed criteria for a BA or BS.
- Revisions prompted by the new General Education curriculum.
- Revisions to minor programs intended to facilitate their incorporation into major programs.
- Programs changes intended to bring or keep programs within the 90-credit limit for majors (but also see #4).

We think that it is important to acknowledge that these kinds of changes are ones which faculty will be proposing in order to bring their programs in alignment with the new, basic structure of a WOU education, and not for internally motivated or disciplinarily rooted reasons.

4. That the 90-credit limit on program requirements be implemented as a norm rather than as a strict requirement.

While we know that many WOU students currently end up taking a relatively high number of credits to graduation - averaging approximately 30 credits above 180 (as reported from the ARC in November 2017) - we would also note recent curricular and structural changes that may positively affect this number, including the new General Education program, the elimination of a general minor requirement, and the reduction of the upper division credit requirement from 62 to 60. These other changes should afford faculty some freedom to exceed 90 credits with their major programs, particularly as they experiment with adjustments to university-wide changes in degree requirements and address other issues, like professional accreditation, that may constrain options for bringing programs into compliance with the 90-credit limit.

The question of strictly enforcing the 90-credit limit can be revisited when and if data on student credit loads suggest that such a limit may, in fact, be necessary for WOU to better serve

students. In the meantime, a more flexible approach to enforcement will allow faculty the freedom to shape their programs in ways that they think will best serve students academically.

While we are recommending a “soft” approach to the 90-credit limit, we also think that 90 credits is a reasonable benchmark for major programs, particularly for those that may serve a significant number of transfer students and where affordability and time to graduation may be of special concern.

5. That there be a review in three years from the implementation of the new definitions of the BA and BS (2021-2022) to evaluate and assess the effect of those definitions on programs, particularly languages.

As faculty, we know that the scale and scope of the changes being implemented and discussed right now can be cause for confusion or frustration. However, we also think that this moment is an opportunity for all of us to consider how our academic programs could be revised and augmented to better serve our students. In particular, this is a moment to consider how we can add to and redesign our academic programs to broaden and deepen the educations we offer, while also taking seriously problems like college affordability and accessibility and the varying needs of our students.

If, for example, you consider language study as an essential or valuable addition to the educations of your major students, you now have an opportunity to not only require such study of your majors, but to tailor the requirement to what you think is appropriate in terms of proficiency, number of credits, or, even, choice of language. This is also true of other potential requirements, such as additional math or computer science, minors, or any combination of additional coursework that would be complementary to the “basic” requirements of your major programs. You could also consider different sets of optional requirements that would be adaptable for the particular needs and interests of individual students.

The intent of these interrelated proposals is to empower departmental faculty to shape their programs to serve students as effectively as possible.

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