

Types of University Degrees

The totality of a university education including general education requirements, the student's major and any elective courses required to fulfill the credit requirement is known as a "degree." General education requirements may also be known as "distribution requirements" or "core requirements." Traditionally, these courses introduce students to the variety of disciplines at the university including the arts and humanities, mathematics, social science, and natural sciences. (Most major universities require competency in a second language and introductory courses in college composition.) Pedagogically, these courses are meant to introduce students to variety of ways that society, culture and nature (and their interactions) are studied at the university including: the understanding of human culture, art, and artifacts through the analysis of ideas and texts; appreciation of art and cultural products through concepts of beauty, symmetry and expression; understanding society and culture empirically through quantitative and conceptual analysis; understanding nature through appreciation, experiment, and theoretical frames of reference. While these skills traditionally have been taught in basic disciplines such as literature, history and chemistry, the growth of interdisciplinary approaches at the university and the rise of teaching through application have lead to the extension of the general education into professional disciplines.

Universities award various different *types* of degrees, which are referred to through *degree titles* including the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), the Bachelor of Science (B.S.), the Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.), the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering (B.S.E.E.), Bachelor of Nursing (B.S.N.), etc. While the bachelor degree in general represents a university education in ensemble, the degree titles specify the nature of that education. (Majors specify the focus of a university education, but do not appear in the formal title. At the University of Washington, only the degree title appears on the diploma.) Programs leading to professional degrees in such fields as nursing, engineering and fine arts include the focus of the education in the degree title and typically are restrictive in content. Broadly speaking, while Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science are less restrictive, they also differ as to degree of specialization. Here follows working definitions of the BA and BS.

Bachelor of Arts degree: The Bachelor of Arts degree usually indicates a liberal arts education and is most often awarded to students pursuing majors in the arts, humanities and social sciences. It is typically the most flexible of university degrees, as most majors within it do not require extensive pre-requisite courses. The major, while providing the specialization required of all degrees, allows students to choose among options. Accordingly, research is defined broadly and, to some degree, may be defined by the student. Broadly speaking, the goals of the BA are to acquaint the student with a discipline and to instill in them the skills to pursue that discipline on their own.

Philosophically, the BA aims to provide a student a broad undergraduate education. Depending upon whether the BA's elective component is restricted to the major or not, it may be used to add strength to the major, to complement the general education, or to explore and develop personal interests, as well as to qualify for advanced study in the major or an associated field. Through

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its combination of specialized study and flexible exploration of the university, the BA provides a critical foundation of skills and knowledge useful in any career.

Bachelor of Science degree: The Bachelor of Science degree, like the Bachelor of Arts, emphasizes a broad selection from the disciplines of the university. However, the Bachelor of Science degree is often more specialized than the Bachelor of Arts degree. While including the same survey of university disciplines in its general education requirements, the Bachelor of Science often also requires prerequisite courses for entry into a major. Majors within the Bachelor of Science will typically require more specific credits and the courses for the degree will often be more directly aligned, so there is less flexibility. Programs leading to a BS generally have more quantitative and mathematical requirements, while the programs involve a high level of interdependence of required courses and consequently incorporate sequential studies. Research within the major will often require prescribed methods such as laboratory study or fieldwork.

Philosophically, BS degree programs provide for a specialized and research-oriented undergraduate education; practically, the students will often be considering graduate study or careers in specific fields that require the use of experimentation and the application of scientific principles and facts in solving problems; understanding of the critical role of mathematical reasoning; analysis and techniques in comprehending problems in the natural or social sciences. However, while “science” in the title makes it appear that the degree is awarded for achievement in the natural sciences, what it truly connotes is the amount of specialization.

Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in Natural and Social Sciences: When a program offers both a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Science, the distinction between the two programs is often between one that offers specialist training in the field with curricular flexibility for the student (the BA) and an integrated, research-oriented program, often with more quantitative requirements (the BS). Often the BS is specifically tailored for students who plan careers in the field, while the BA provides a more generalized university education, but also equips them to work in allied fields. In some cases, a BS will also require a specialized or experiential component, since the practice of a field may occur in many other places besides a laboratory.