



Structure of the U.S. Education System: Bachelor's Degrees

The bachelor's degree is the most common first degree in U.S. higher education and is the degree that gives access to advanced studies. U.S. bachelor's degrees are usually planned to take 4 academic years of full-time study to complete. However, many degrees take longer to complete, including those in engineering, architecture and other fields; and many bachelor's degrees are completed in less than 4 years by highly qualified and motivated students. Bachelor's degrees may be awarded in academic or professional fields of study.

BACHELOR'S DEGREE DESCRIPTION

The bachelor's degree may be defined as "An award that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work. This includes all bachelor's degrees conferred in a 5-year cooperative (work-study) program. A cooperative plan provides for alternate class attendance and employment in business, industry, or government; thus, it allows students to combine actual work experience with their college studies. Also includes bachelor's degrees in which the normal 4 years of work are completed in 3 years." (NCES)

U.S. bachelor degree programs usually include requirements for breadth as well as depth of study, and students will fulfill what are called liberal or general studies requirements for introductory knowledge in several subjects as well as a concentration in one or more subjects, called a "major." Students are assigned a faculty advisor, usually in the intended field of study, who assists the student in developing a plan of study that is coherent and uses the general education requirements to support the major. Many students become exempt from the general requirements through faculty examinations, presentation of Advanced Placement (AP) examination scores (3 or higher), or presentation of an International Baccalaureate (IB) or other advanced or honors secondary qualification.

Some U.S. undergraduate students' transcripts may show that remedial courses were completed, or examinations taken, in order to correct deficiencies or to complete prerequisites for certain subjects. It is important to know, however, that U.S. accreditation rules do not allow remedial work to be awarded undergraduate credit.

Inter- or multi-disciplinarity is a major thrust of U.S. higher education, and it begins with the first degree level. U.S. educators and employers believe strongly that the bachelor's degree should prepare students for entry-level jobs as well as for possible advanced study. Whether students continue their studies or enter the labor market, they will need to understand the basic principles of fields other than their own narrow specialization, and they will need skills – such as languages, IT and computational skills – that cannot be obtained exclusively in their major field. This extra knowledge and skill must be obtained at the higher education level. Secondary-level preparation cannot substitute for it. And the degree program should be structured so that the additional knowledge and skill complements the main subject concentration.

Most bachelor's degrees are titled Bachelor of Arts (BA or AB) or Bachelor of Science (BS or SB), but there are many other bachelor's degree titles in use.

HONORS BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Honors bachelor's degrees are awarded and involve more independent study, require a thesis or special project, and may have special admissions requirements. The designation, admission and content standards for honors degrees are set by the awarding institution. Honors degrees are usually designated on the degree transcript and sometimes on the degree diploma, and the title of the honors thesis or project will often be provided.

Liberal Arts and General Education

[AACU Description of Liberal Arts Education](#) provides information on the concept of liberal education and explanations of the various terms used to refer to this model of undergraduate education.

[AACU Description of General Education](#) provides information on the concept of general education and links to various resources.

Content and Quality in Undergraduate Education

[Project on Accreditation and Assessment](#) provides an analysis of quality assurance factors related to liberal arts programs at the bachelor's degree level.

[AIS Guidelines for Interdisciplinary General Education](#) is the Association for Integrative Studies' recommendations for quality assessment of general education programs.

[State Student Learning Assessment Database](#) is a linked directory of information on state policies and procedures for assessing undergraduate learning.

[Credit Production and Progress Toward the Bachelor's Degree](#) examines the content of bachelor's degree programs and progress toward the degree using national data sources.

Remedial (Non-Credit) Education

[Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions](#) provides the most recent available data on the extent and nature of remedial education services, who offers such services, and institutional policies regarding remedial education.

Bachelor's Degree Productivity and Outcomes

[Beginning Postsecondary Students \(BPS\) Survey](#) is a national longitudinal study of a cohort of 9,000 students enrolled in 800 higher education institutions that examined their educational experiences and attainment.

[Baccalaureate and Beyond \(BB\) Survey](#) is a longitudinal study of national cohorts of bachelor degree recipients (1993, 1997, and 2003) that examines their graduate study and work experiences after earning a first (bachelor's) degree.

POST-BACHELOR'S CERTIFICATES

A number of U.S. higher education institutions offer programs that permit a student to earn a specialized certificate (it can also be called a diploma) at the same time the bachelor's degree is earned or shortly thereafter. These certificates may indicate the mastery of knowledge and skills, such as foreign languages or computer software, or the completion of additional requirements permitting access to professional licensure procedures, as in teacher training, accounting, and other fields. Post-bachelor's certificates usually require no more than a single academic year to complete, and are often completed as part of the degree program. They do not constitute a separate degree level and are not degrees.

FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED BACHELOR'S DEGREE TITLES

NOTE: This is only a partial list of such titles for informational purposes, not an exhaustive or official list.

Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch.)*
Bachelor of Arts/Artium Baccalaureus (B.A., A.B.)
Bachelor of Business (B.B.)/Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.)
 Bachelor of Science in Business (B.S.B.)
Bachelor of Canon Law (B.C.L.)
Bachelor of Computer Science (B.C.S.)/Bachelor of Science in Computer Science (B.S.C.S.)
Bachelor of Criminal Justice (B.C.J.)/Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice (B.S.C.J.)
Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.)*
Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)/Bachelor of Science in Education (B.S.Ed.)
 Bachelor of Wireless Engineering (B.W.E.)
Bachelor of Engineering (B.E./B.Eng.)/Bachelor of Science in Engineering (B.S.E./B.S.EN.)
 Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering (B.S.A.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Engineering (B.S.A.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Biological Systems (B.S.B.S.)
 Bachelor of Science in Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering (B.S.B.A.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Biological Engineering (B.S.B.E.)
 Bachelor of Biomedical Engineering (B.B.m.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering (B.S.B.E./B.S.B.M.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering (B.S.Ch.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering (B.S.Ch.B.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Chemical and Materials Engineering (B.S.C.M.E.)
 Bachelor of Civil Engineering (B.C.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering (B.S.C.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Civil and Infrastructure Engineering (B.S.-C.I.E.)
 Bachelor of Computer Engineering (B.Comp.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering (B.S.C.E./B.S.Co.E/B.S.Cp.E./B.S.Cmp.E./B.S.C.P.)
 Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Engineering (B.S.C.S.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Computer Engineering (B.S.E.C.E.)
 Bachelor of Electrical Engineering (B.E.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering (B.S.E.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Engineering Management (B.S.E.Mgt.)
 Bachelor of Science in Environmental Engineering (B.S.En.E./B.S.Env.E.)
 Bachelor of Fiber Engineering (B.F.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering (B.S.I.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Manufacturing Engineering (B.S.Mfg.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Manufacturing Systems Engineering (B.S.M.S.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Materials Science and Engineering (B.S.M.S.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Materials Engineering (B.S.MA.E.)
 Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering (B.M.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering (B.S.M.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Metallurgical Engineering (B.S.Mt.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Mining Engineering (B.S.MI.E.)
 Bachelor of Science in Systems (B.S.-SYST.)
 Bachelor of Software Engineering (B.S.W.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Software Engineering (B.S.S.E.)
 Bachelor of Systems Engineering (B.S.E.)/Bachelor of Science in Systems Engineering (B.S.S.E.)
Bachelor of Engineering Technology (B.E.T.)/Bachelor of Science in Engineering Technology (B.S.E.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering Technology (B.S.C.E.T./B.S.Civ.E.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering Technology (B.S.C.E.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Construction Engineering Technology (B.S.Con.E.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Drafting Design Technology (B.S.D.D.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Electrical/Electronics Technology (B.S.E.T.)
 Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology (B.S.E.E.T.)

Bachelor of Science in Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology (B.S.E.M.E.T.)
Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering Technology (B.S.M.E.T.)
Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.)
Bachelor of Forestry (B.F.)
Bachelor of Science in Forest Research (B.S.For.Res.)
Bachelor of Hebrew Letters (B.H.L.)
Bachelor of Journalism (B.J.)
Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.)*
Bachelor of Liberal Studies (B.L.S.)**
Bachelor of Literature (B.Lit.)
Bachelor of Marine Science (B.M.S.)
Bachelor of Music (B.M.)
Bachelor of Nursing (B.N.)/Bachelor of Science in Nursing (B.S.N.)
Bachelor of Pharmacy (B.Pharm.)*
Bachelor of Philosophy (B.Phil.)
Bachelor of Religious Education (B.R.E.)
Bachelor of Science/Scientiae Baccalaureus (B.S., S.B.)
Bachelor of Science in Chemistry (B.S.Ch.)
Bachelor of Technology (B.T./B.Tech.)

Titles marked with a single asterisk (*) are degrees that are either no longer offered or are being phased out, but may occasionally be encountered.

The B.L.S. degree (**) is frequently awarded to graduates of programs in divisions of continuing or adult education, as well as to students who complete structured and supervised independent studies programs. Despite the title, the content of this degree often corresponds to regular B.A. or B.S. programs in academic or professional fields.

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