

# INDIVIDUAL DEGREE PROGRAM DESIGN, REVIEW, AND APPROVAL

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**Implementation History:** New Policy

**Keywords:** Academic review, area of study guidelines, associate degree, bachelor's degree,

concentration, degree program, educational planning, individualized

degree program, individualized

credit for prior learning (iCPL), rationale essay

**Background Information:** This policy is the culmination of university-wide consultation through initiatives and taskforces over the

past decade. The policy merges and updates several policies: 1)

Individualized Program Design Policy, 2)

Individualized Degree Program Review and Approval Policy and

Procedures, 3) Degree Program

Rationale Policy, and 4) Individualized Program: Educational Planning.

## Purpose

This policy defines the requirement for educational planning credits for individualized degree programs, and how through a course in educational planning, an individualized degree program proposal is submitted and approved by a faculty committee for academic review and by the Office of the Registrar prior to a degree being awarded.

## Definitions

**Advanced Level:** Study that builds on introductory level learning that involves higher levels of abstraction, increasingly extensive knowledge, complex content, and greater methodological sophistication. It is also known as upper-level study.

**Advanced Standing:** Credits earned outside SUNY Empire from acceptable sources, e.g., college transcripts, military transcripts, standardized exams, professional learning evaluations (PLE), and individualized credit for prior learning (iCPL).

**Degree Program (DP):** The comprehensive plan for a student's degree, created with the guidance of a mentor, that identifies advanced standing credits, planned CPL, and all courses to be completed at SUNY Empire. Once the degree program is approved (concurred), it becomes the official curriculum that the student follows to complete their degree.

**Educational Planning Course:** A course that meets the Educational Planning credit requirement.

**Individualized Degree Program:** Program of study intentionally created or personally designed by the

student within Areas of Study to earn their degree.

**Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies:** Liberal Arts and Sciences studies have a strong theoretical content, generally from the disciplines of the humanities, natural sciences, mathematics, and social sciences. Department Expectations: Curriculum | New York State Education Department (nysed.gov)

**Rationale Essay:** A narrative essay written by the student to explain the Individualized Degree Program's purpose and design.

**Residency Requirement:** The minimum number of credits taken at the institution in order to receive a degree.

**Specialized Baccalaureate Degree:** A bachelor's degree other than the B.A. or B.S. degree, often in a professional field.

## Policy Statements

### Associate Degree Designations

- Associate degrees require a minimum of 60 credits.
- The Associate in Arts designation requires a minimum of 45 liberal arts and sciences credits.
- The Associate in Science designation requires a minimum of 30 liberal arts and sciences credits.

### Bachelor's Degree Designations

- Bachelor's degrees require a minimum of 120 credits.
- The Bachelor of Arts degree designation requires a minimum of 90 liberal arts and sciences credits.
- The Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Science in Nursing degrees require a minimum of 60 liberal arts and sciences credits.
- Specialized baccalaureate degrees, such as the Bachelor of Professional Studies (B.P.S.) and the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) must contain at least 30 credits of liberal arts and sciences.
- For bachelor's degrees, at least 45 credits must be in advanced-level studies

## Educational Planning Course Credit Requirement

Individualized degree programs require educational planning course credits. A minimum of 4 credits are required for bachelor's programs and 2 for associate degree programs. For both associate and bachelor's degrees, an educational planning course of at least two credits that results in a rationale essay and completed degree plan is required. No more than 8 credits from courses with the EDPL prefix may be counted toward the degree.

When dual degrees or concentrations are sought that include both Individualized and Structured Programs, educational planning must be satisfied for the Individualized Degree portion of the program.

A returning student seeking a second bachelor's individualized degree must include 2 additional credits from an educational planning course that results in a rationale essay and completed degree plan.

## Rationale Essay

Individualized Degree Programs are submitted for review with a rationale essay written by the student that explains the purpose and design of the degree.

When two degree programs are submitted for review at the same time, one essay may be submitted that provides the required information for both.

## Academic Review

Individualized degree programs are submitted with a degree program and rationale essay.

Students must submit individualized degree programs to Offices of Academic Review before they have earned 24 credits at SUNY Empire.

## Exceptions

Requests for reduced or eliminated educational planning or rationale essay requirements (i.e. International Education and equivalent partnerships) must be approved by the Committee for Undergraduate Programs (CUP).

## Area of Study Guidelines

Students design individualized degree programs that meet the expectations outlined in area of study guidelines. See the area of study guidelines section of the undergraduate catalog for specific information.

## Concentration

Every degree program has two main sections: concentration and general learning. Concentration identifies the central focus of the degree program and consists of a series of related studies building on each other and forming a coherent whole. General learning provides an opportunity to explore new areas, add breadth to degree programs, and develop new competencies.

Students develop a concentration for their individualized degree program in consultation with their mentor. Students may select a concentration with specific guidelines that identify knowledge expectations or propose an individualized concentration title, and the title should be supported and accurately reflected through multiple studies and in multiple ways. Some concentration titles are restricted, please refer to the undergraduate catalog for more information.

For bachelor's degrees, concentrations must include at least 24 credits at the advanced level. Concentrations that are larger than 50 percent of the degree should be examined carefully to be sure

the learning is appropriately integrated. Large concentrations are acceptable if the degree program satisfies the educational objectives for undergraduate degrees and meet stated expectations regarding liberal arts content.

As the central focus of the student's individualized degree program, the concentration must be qualitatively strong. The learning components in a concentration should be related, should include advanced and complex study, and should come together as a coherent whole. Therefore, in addition to serving individual educational goals, the concentration should meet the criteria of progression and integration. Appropriate advanced standing may be used toward the concentration. Progression emphasizes development from introductory toward increasingly advanced learning in the concentration.

## Degree Program Rationale Essay

The rationale essay is written to explain the purpose, design, and significance of individualized degree programs. Through a rationale essay the student discusses:

- Their educational background and professional experience.
- How the proposed degree plan meets their academic goals and learning needs.
- How the learning in the degree plan reflects the SUNY Empire area of study learning outcomes and concentration guidelines for the degree when applicable, or in rare instances how their learning deviates from the learning outcomes to meet a specific educational need.
- Awareness of external professional expectations, where applicable.

The rationale essay accompanies the individualized degree plan and is a key outcome of the required study in educational planning. The final draft that accompanies the individualized degree program when it goes for academic review should meet college-level writing expectations in terms of substance, presentation, and academic integrity.

## Elements of the Degree Program Proposal

All degree program proposals include:

- Degree program plan
- Degree program rationale essay
- General education document
- Individualized credit for prior learning (iCPL) evaluations if applicable
- For planned CPL, a memo outlining the attributes of each request including whether the CPL will address/meet requirements such as general education or an area of study guideline if applicable

Official copies of college transcripts for all completed advanced standing must be received by the Admission Office prior to degree program proposal submission.

Programs may be approved with:

- Up to 16 outstanding CPL credits
- Other planned or in-progress advanced standing, including directly transferable college credits,
- Credit by examination, and Professional Learning Evaluation (PLE)

## Timing of Submission of Degree Program Proposal

Active students may submit a degree program for approval as early as their first term of matriculation into an undergraduate degree program.

Students must submit their degree program for approval no later than the end of the term in which they will have earned their 24th SUNY Empire credit.

## Students Earning More Than One Degree at SUNY Empire

Students who plan to earn two individualized degrees from SUNY Empire (e.g., both an associate and a bachelor's degree) must submit a proposal for each degree program.

Students planning to continue on to an individualized bachelor's degree program after completing an individualized associate degree at SUNY Empire are encouraged to plan and submit the bachelor's degree program concurrently with the associate degree program. Students must submit the bachelor's degree program for review and approval prior to their second term of enrollment after the award of the associate degree program.

For students wishing to earn a second bachelor's degree, see the Degree Credit and Residency Policy.

## Completion of the Approved Degree Program

The student is responsible for making enrollment choices each term, in consultation with their mentor, which are consistent with their approved degree program.

Failure to complete the approval process in the timeframe outlined above, or failure to complete the program as approved, may mean that the student must earn additional credit to graduate.

## Substitutions in Approved Degree Programs

Students may make substitutions for degree components so long as they do not change the substance of the degree and still meet all degree requirements. Requests for substitutions to the approved degree program must be initiated by the student and mentor and approved and applied by a designee of academic affairs.

## Degree Program Amendments

Changes to area of study and/or concentration title require a formal degree program amendment rereviewed by committee.

## Applicable Legislation and Regulations

- Minimum Credit Requirement (<http://catalog.sunyempire.edu/undergraduate/earning-undergraduate-degree/#text>)
- Policy and Guidance: Seamless Transfer Requirements (<https://system.suny.edu/student-success/transfer/policies-guidance/>)
- Program Registration Guidance Documents (<https://www.nysed.gov/college-university-evaluation/program-registration-guidance-documents/>)
- SUNY General Education Requirements (<https://www.suny.edu/attend/academics/genedreq/>)

## Related References, Policies, Procedures, Forms and Appendices

- Degree Credit and Residency Requirements Policy (<https://catalog.sunyempire.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies-procedures/degree-credit-residency-policy/>)
- Individualized Prior Learning Assessment Policy (<https://sunyempire.edu/policies/?search=cid%3D36988>)
- Student Academic Appeals Policy (<https://sunyempire.edu/policies/?search=cid%3D37972>)
- Transfer Credit Policy (<https://sunyempire.edu/policies/?search=cid%3D126377>)