

# INDIVIDUALIZED DEGREE DESIGN

One of the hallmarks of Empire State University's undergraduate programs is that students have the option to design their own degree program. This approach allows students to tailor their degree to fit their individual goals and interests, focus on emerging fields of study, as well as maximize transfer and advanced standing credits. Individualized degree programs are possible in the following areas of study:

- Arts;
- Business, Management and Economics;
- Community and Human Services;
- Cultural Studies;
- Educational Studies;
- Historical Studies;
- Human Development;
- Interdisciplinary Studies;
- Labor Studies;
- Science, Mathematics and Technology;
- Social Science; and
- Technology (B.P.S. only)

When pursuing an individualized undergraduate degree in one of our 12 areas of study, students work with a mentor in an educational planning study or course, through which they create a plan for their degree. A minimum of 4 credits are required for bachelor's programs and 2 for associate degree programs, with a minimum of 2 credits required from an educational planning course that results in a rationale essay and completed degree plan. No more than 8 credits from courses with the EDPL prefix may be counted toward the degree.

Students use guidelines developed by Empire State University and requirements established by the State University of New York (SUNY) to plan their degree to fit their goals. In addition to degrees in the 12 areas of study, SUNY Empire also offers a number of structured degree programs. A complete list of both structured and individualized programs, along with their guidelines, can be found in the Undergraduate Program (<http://catalog.esc.edu/undergraduate/areas-study-degrees-certificates/>)s section of this catalog.

## AREAS OF STUDY AND CONCENTRATION GUIDELINES

The areas of study and concentration guidelines identify the knowledge expectations of academic and/or professional fields for the university's 12 individualized degrees. Students use the guidelines to develop their degrees so that they include both expected knowledge and currency in their field. The guidelines are not names of specific courses; instead, they identify knowledge expectations that are included in multiple courses and in multiple ways.

A student's degree represents a body of knowledge that has been acquired. If a student chooses to design a degree with a concentration, his or her mentor helps develop a concentration title that accurately represents a focus that fits within the particular area of study.

In planning a degree, the student's mentor helps interpret the guidelines. When the degree program is submitted for approval it goes through faculty and university-level review processes; the guidelines will be used as the basis for the review of the degree design and concentration. In the

degree program rationale, the student explains how studies address the area of study and where necessary, concentration guidelines, as well as the university's learning goals and degree requirements.

## THE AREA OF STUDY GUIDELINES FRAMEWORKS

Each area of study guideline is written broadly to represent a body of knowledge expected within that field. The guidelines will help to structure the degree with the student's goals in mind. Degrees fall into one of five general structures or frameworks:

1. **Disciplinary** – a program of study guided by the existing framework of a discipline. Degrees designed around this framework are similar in design to programs of study at other institutions.
2. **Interdisciplinary** – a program of study that simultaneously interrelates two or more disciplines. Degrees designed around this framework draw upon the methods and bodies of knowledge of multiple disciplines to think across boundaries.
3. **Problem Oriented** – a program of study designed around a problem. Degrees designed around this framework examine a significant issue in depth from multiple perspectives.
4. **Professional/Vocational** – a program of study that focuses on acquiring knowledge and skills needed for specific career performance and applications. Degrees designed around this framework explore the conceptual foundations of the profession, the role of the professional in that career, and the relations between the profession and society at large.
5. **Thematic** – a program of study focusing on a particular theme or set of ideas. Degrees designed around this framework trace the development of a theme or idea, or explore various aspects of a theme to examine its cultural and intellectual influence.

## CONCENTRATIONS AND GENERAL LEARNING

Individualized degree programs at Empire State University divide learning into two major categories: concentrations and general learning. A student's concentration may be a focused, in-depth study of a discipline (for example, economics, physics, political science); an interrelated study of two or more disciplines; the study of a problem or a theme; or study in preparation for a profession or vocation.

Because it requires serious, focused learning and implies a degree of competence in an area, a bachelor's degree concentration should contain at least 24 to 41 credits of study. Generally, no more than half of the total number of degree credits should be in the concentration. An associate degree can have a concentration but does not need to.

Professional areas regulated by State Education Law (e.g., engineering) are not included in SUNY Empire's range of concentrations. The area of study guidelines are included in this catalog (see page 25). For detailed information, including concentration guidelines and excluded concentration titles, see the Student Degree Planning Guide.

Degree programs also must contain general learning, a term used to describe learning outside of the concentration. General learning may support the concentration, may add breadth to the degree program and meet general education requirements, or may be in areas that are unrelated to the concentration but are of interest.

## CONCENTRATION GUIDELINES AND TITLES

In addition to the broader, general area of study guidelines, several areas of studies have developed concentration guidelines that have specific meaning in the academic and professional worlds. These concentration guidelines also identify knowledge expectations rather than specific

courses. Students can address these expectations through multiple studies and in multiple ways.

Many degrees that are designed around a disciplinary or professional/vocational framework use established concentration titles. For example, in the Business, Management and Economics area of study guidelines, there are specific concentration titles for Economics, Finance, Marketing and more. In the Science, Mathematics and Technology area of study guidelines, there are specific concentration titles for Biology, Mathematics, Information Systems, Computer Science and others.

In addition, students often design concentrations for which no specific guidelines exist. These students research their interests and explain their choices within their degree program rationale. Students can self-design their own concentration title using a disciplinary or professional/vocational framework, as long as the title is clear about the learning represented in the degree. If the degree is designed around an interdisciplinary, problem oriented or thematic framework, they will be designing his or her own concentration title. Many students decide to develop their own concentration titles, especially when they have significant advanced standing credits. This option provides flexibility in the degree program design. For example, if a student chooses to design a degree in business without including several of the topics listed in one of the concentration guidelines, he or she might select another framework and develop a title that better describes the degree program plan.

#### **Restricted Concentration titles**

New York state education law regulates certain kinds of professional education, and Empire State University cannot offer concentration titles in certain professional areas.

New York state has additional regulations for a concentration in education or a degree in accounting. Certification/licensure in education and accounting require additional education beyond the bachelor's degree. All students within the Educational Studies area of study or pursuing an Accounting degree, or who plan to acquire one of these certifications, must complete a certification disclaimer form indicating that they understand they will need more education to reach their goal. These forms are located on the university's website at Student Degree Planning Guide | Degree Planning and Academic Review | Empire State University ([sunyempire.edu](https://www.sunyempire.edu)) (<https://www.sunyempire.edu/degree-planning-academic-review/degree-program/student-degree-planning-guide/>).

## **DOUBLE CONCENTRATIONS**

Double concentrations are possible in bachelor's degrees, when appropriate, but are not possible in an associate degree. When a degree program has a double concentration, each area must be represented by a set of integrated learning components that demonstrate progression to advanced levels of learning. The university has established guidelines for completing concentrations in each area of study. These guidelines outline general expectations for study in the area, as well as specific expectations for certain concentrations. In addition, students often design concentrations for which no specific guidelines exist. These students research their interests and explain their choices within their degree program rationale. Students should talk to their mentor if they are interested in a double concentration.

## **CHANGING YOUR DEGREE PROGRAM OR AREA OF STUDY**

During the degree planning process, students may find that the degree type and/or area of study that they originally planned no longer fits their educational goals. Or, they may find that they would like to pursue more than one degree. For example, many students who enroll for a bachelor's degree find that it makes sense to complete an associate degree along the way. If students are considering these types of decisions, they need to consult with their mentor to understand the procedures and implications.