

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
(Final; Information)

EP.24.068 Interim Guidance Regarding Implementation of the Illinois Board of Higher Education
40 Upper-Division Hour Criterion

Executive Summary: To comply with Illinois Board of Higher Education policy new bachelor’s degree programs must have 40 hours of upper-division coursework as defined below. Until such time as a campus-wide policy is enacted, existing degree programs seeking to revise their Program of Study do not need to satisfy this requirement, although the Senate Committee on Educational Policy (EP) is asking such proposals to provide information regarding how imposing the 40-hour criterion would impact their program.

Background: The Illinois Board of Higher Education’s (IBHE) approval criteria for new baccalaureate degree programs state that any new program must have at least 40 semester hours of upper-division courses, where upper-division is defined as “course content and teaching appropriate for junior- and senior-year students in a baccalaureate program or other students with expertise in the subject.”¹ Notably, IBHE does not directly address how this criterion should be applied to existing programs or how the definition of “upper-division” should be implemented on any particular campus.

To address these issues, in the fall of 2023 EP convened a Task Force charged with examining these issues and making recommendations to the committee and, through it, to the Senate. The Task Force’s work is ongoing. However, in the course of its work it has become apparent that the recommendations that the Task Force makes will likely take time to implement. In light of this, EP is providing the following guidance regarding current practice in evaluating the 40-hour criterion. This document focuses, for the most part, on program revisions since IBHE has a clear policy regarding proposals to establish new degree programs. We expect these guidelines to remain in place until the Task Force’s recommendations result in a permanent policy.²

Definition of Upper-Division Courses: To date, IBHE has accepted a definition of upper-division coursework on this campus that includes courses listed at the 300 and 400 levels as well as 200-level courses with two or more prerequisites. These prerequisites may be sequential. EP has been applying this definition in evaluating proposals for new degree programs.

¹ <https://www.ibhe.org/assets/files/PublicAdminRules2017.pdf>

² Importantly: IBHE now routinely requires 40 hours of upper-division coursework for any bachelor’s degree programs it reviews. New degree programs are always reviewed. Certain other changes deemed “Reasonable and Moderate Extensions” of existing programs may also be reviewed. Generally, revisions to existing degree programs that do not change the total hours for the degree are reported to IBHE but do not receive a formal review. However, the level of scrutiny applied to program revisions could be increased in the future. See the [Levels of Governance](#) as a guide to which proposal types necessitate detailed IBHE proposals; the Provost’s office can be consulted to assist in making determinations about governance levels required.

Definition of Degree Program: The IBHE criterion is applied to the entire degree program, i.e., the full 120 (or more) hours required to graduate, which includes courses in the major area of study, general education courses, free electives, etc. The upper-division hours need not come from the specific requirements for the major. They can also be drawn from free electives or other components of the full degree program.

Information Proposals to Revise Existing Programs Should Provide to EP: Proposals to revise existing baccalaureate programs submitted to EP for review should either:

- (i) describe how the program currently requires 40 hours of upper-division coursework in the sense that any student completing the program's requirements will automatically have 40 hours of upper-division coursework, or
- (ii) describe how the program allows for a student to obtain 40 hours of upper-division coursework in addition to satisfying all other requirements in the program of study through appropriate choice of courses (even if there are other paths through the program that would not involve 40 upper-division hours),³ or
- (iii) describe a plan for how the program could incorporate changes over the next several years that will allow a student to obtain 40 hours of upper-division coursework in addition to satisfying the other degree requirements. Specific steps might include renumbering of courses or changing prerequisites when appropriate, creating new upper division courses, identifying accessible upper-division electives, changing major requirements, etc.

As mentioned above, the upper-division hours can be drawn from all elements of the program of study, including free electives. Most responses will fall into category (i) or (ii).

Where and how this information should be provided: The program's response to the question above should be provided at the end of the Justification section in CIM-P until such time that CIM-P can be updated to include a question on this point. Specific information that should be provided includes (a) a list of required courses/hours meeting the above definition of upper-division, (b) a list of upper-division courses/hours that are available as choices from "choose from" categories within the major requirements (even if not all available choices are upper division), (c) upper-division hours that can be chosen from among the program's free electives (as well as the number of free elective hours in the program of study). Finally, the proposal could comment on any additional measures that might be undertaken to move the program toward satisfying the 40-hour criterion and ensuring students' timely progress toward degree completion if such a policy is implemented on this campus. Several examples of how programs might respond to this question are presented in the Appendix to this document. They

³ This could involve specifying choices of upper-division hours from courses in "choose from" lists or use of free electives.

are inspired by actual programs that are in or have recently completed revision but are not necessarily identical to the information that was submitted.

How This Information is Used: At this point, the proposal's response regarding how the 40-hour upper-division coursework criterion is met/could be met is informational only. Until there is a permanent campus policy in place, future proposals to revise existing programs will not be required to document enforcement of the 40 hours of upper-division coursework criterion. However, in anticipation of the criterion being enforced across all baccalaureate programs on campus as a likely recommendation of the Task Force, EP is beginning to collect this information now to ensure that programs are aware of the requirement and have begun to consider its eventual implementation. Understanding the challenges programs face in achieving 40 hours of upper-division courses will also inform implementation of any forthcoming recommendations from the Task Force.

What EP Looks For: As part of its review of new and revised programs, EP considers whether the program is designed in such a way that students can be expected to complete it in a reasonable amount of time and without overly restricting their freedom to choose courses that interest them. While free electives can and should play a role in the plan to eventually meet the 40-hour criterion, overreliance on requiring students to take general education courses at the upper-division level is viewed as generally inconsistent with the distinct aims of the general education requirement and the upper-division criterion.⁴

For existing programs EP is looking for assurance that the program is aware of and has begun the process of considering the impact of imposition of the 40 hours of upper-division coursework criterion on degree completion. While we do require that proposals to revise programs provide information to help consider this question, we do not anticipate that the committee will refuse to forward program revisions to the full Senate (i.e., reject proposals) based only on the program's failure to meet the 40-hours criterion as currently configured.

40-Hours Statement in the Program of Study: In recent years, program revisions have been asked to include a statement in their Program of Study to the effect of "a minimum of 40 hours of upper-division coursework generally at the 300- and 400-level is required. These hours can be drawn from all elements of the degree." In anticipation of implementation of a campus-wide policy following the completion of the Task Force's work, in the interim EP will no longer ask programs to include this statement in their program of study. Programs that have included this statement and wish to remove it until the implementation of a permanent policy should submit a proposal to revise their existing program of study through the CIM-P. The justification for the proposed change should address the costs and benefits of removing the statement given that in the near future the 40-hour criterion may be required for all bachelor's degree programs. Any program that proposes to remove the 40-hours statement should ensure that the program still meets the campus's existing requirement of 21 hours of advanced

⁴ Courses that satisfy the Advanced Composition requirement, which are supposed to build on skills initially developed in other courses, and some of the courses satisfying the Quantitative Reasoning II requirement, are exceptions to this observation.

coursework.⁵ Programs established since IBHE began enforcing the 40-hour criterion may not be able to remove the statement.

Proposals for New Programs of Study: A proposal to create a new program of study receives full IBHE review during which the board evaluates whether the 40-hour criterion is satisfied. The instructions for new programs of study remain as is currently stated in CIM-P.

Baccalaureate degree requires at least 120 semester credit hours or 180 quarter credit hours and at least 40 semester credit hours (60 quarter credit hours) in upper division courses” (source: <https://www.ibhe.org/assets/files/PublicAdminRules2017.pdf>). For proposals for new bachelor’s degrees, if this minimum is not explicitly met by specifically-required 300- and/or 400-level courses, please provide information on how the upper-division hours requirement will be satisfied.

To answer this question the program of study may make use of specifically required courses at the 300- and/or 400-level, 200-level courses with two or more prerequisites, available upper-division options in “choose from” lists, or free electives. As in the case of program revisions, new program proposals should provide a breakdown into (a) a list of required courses/hours meeting the above definition of upper-division, (b) a list of upper-division courses/hours that are available as choices from “choose from” categories within the major requirements (even if not all available choices are upper division), (c) upper-division hours that can be chosen from among the program’s free electives (as well as the number of free elective hours in the program of study).

Proposals to create a new bachelor’s degree should include the following at the top of their Program of Study table:

“Minimum of 40 hours of upper-division coursework, generally at the 300- or 400-level. These hours can be drawn from all elements of the degree. Students should consult their academic advisor for additional guidance in fulfilling this requirement.”

EDUCATIONAL POLICY

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⁵ See <https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part8/3-801/>.

Appendix: Examples of the 40-hour Breakout.

Example 1: Journalism, BS

Required Major Courses

4 JOUR 215 (pre-reqs JOUR 200, JOUR 210)

3 JOUR 310 or JOUR 311

Intermediate Skills Courses

8 Choose 2: JOUR 315, JOUR 340, JOUR 425

Advanced Skills Courses

9 Choose 3 from list of courses at 300 level or above.

Context Courses

3 JOUR 450, JOUR 451, JOUR 454 or JOUR 460

Required minor or specialization

6 At least 6 out of 18 hours must be at 300 level or above.

Total of above: 33

After taking into account program requirements, 7 of the remaining hours would need to be upper-division hours. These can be taken from additional upper-division hours in the specialization, the 9 hours of journalism electives, Language Other than English (LOTE), the general education requirement, or free electives. The attached sample sequence has 18 hours of free electives after completing all other requirements, including LOTE and general education.

Example 2: Finance, BS

Any student completing the required business core and finance major requirements will necessarily have 40 hours of upper-division coursework.

a. All Gies UG students have 21 required upper division hours in the business core:

i. ACCY 202 – prereq of ACCY 201 which has a prereq of ECON 102/103 – 3 hours

ii. BUS 301 – 3 hours

iii. BUS 401 – 3 hours

iv. BADM 300 – 3 hours

v. BADM 310 – 3 hours

vi. BADM 320 – 3 hours

vii. BADM 449 – 3 hours

b. The Finance major has an additional 21 hours of required upper division courses.

i. FIN 300 - 3 hours

ii. FIN 321 - 3 hours

iii. FIN 411 - 3 hours

iv. Four FIN electives at the 400 level - 12 hours.

Example 3: Chemistry, BS

Chemistry, BS (Specialized Curriculum) 40 hours upper division sample plan:

Core Chemistry

CHEM 312 - 3 hours

CHEM 315 - 2 hours

CHEM 420 - 2 hours

CHEM 436 - 3 hours
CHEM 442 - 4 hours
CHEM 444 - 4 hours
CHEM 445 - 2 hours
Sum: 20 hours

11 hours Advanced Chemistry - all options are 300 or 400 level

The following 200-level courses are required for the program and have 2 or more prerequisites.

CHEM 236 - 4 hours (prerequisites: CHEM 104 or 204 or 222/223, all of which require CHEM 102)

CHEM 237 - 2 hours (prerequisites: credit or concurrent registration in CHEM 236, which requires CHEM 104 or 204 or 222/223, all of which require CHEM 102)

MATH 241 - 4 hours (prerequisites: MATH 220/221 and 231)

Total equals 41 hours

Example 4: Media and Cinema Studies, BS

(Critical Media Production Track)

3 Theory Course (MACS 320, 326, 356, or 361)

3 Methods Course (MACS 350 or 351)

3 Capstone Course (MACS all at 400 level)

3 MACS electives

Total of above: 12 hours.

The remaining 28 hours can be chosen from additional upper-division MACS electives (9 hours) or College of Media Electives (6 hours), the general education requirement, or Free Electives. The attached sample sequence has 45 hours of free electives after accounting for all program requirements, including the general education and LOTE requirements.