Pathways to Completing an Undergraduate Degree
South Dakota State University
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A first-year student who has already earned substantial credit for college-level course work (30 semester hours or more) may be able to complete some degree programs in less than the anticipated four years. Students in this group typically have applicable credit for SDSU course work through one or more of the following sources:

- Credit "by examination" resulting from successful scores on Advanced Placement (AP) or College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exams;
- Credit “by examination” resulting from scores on modern language placement exams in French, German, or Spanish;
- Credit for college or university course work completed in concurrent/dual enrollment during high school, including course work completed through the International Baccalaureate (IB), or SDSU’s High School Concurrent and Dual Credit programs.
- Transfer credit obtained at community colleges or technical schools, subject to articulation guidelines; or universities outside the South Dakota Board of Regents.

 Completing required course work during summer terms may also shorten time to degree.

What typically fulfills the requirements for an undergraduate degree at South Dakota State University? Most undergraduate programs require a student to complete a minimum of 120 credits. Some programs (i.e., Engineering) require a minimum of 130 credits. An undergraduate degree typically consists of these types of college credit:

- System General Education Requirements (SGRs) are courses approved by the South Dakota Board of Regents (SD BOR) to impart common knowledge and intellectual concepts to students and to develop in them the skills and attitudes that an organization’s faculty believe every educated person should possess. All students completing an undergraduate degree through a SD BOR institution must successfully complete coursework to fulfill the identified general education goals in written communication, oral communication, social sciences, humanities and arts/diversity, mathematics, natural sciences, and information literacy. For more information on SGRs go to: http://catalog.sdstate.edu/content.php?catoid=26&navoid=3057
- Institutional Graduation Requirements (IGRs) are graduation requirements established by the degree-granting institution. These requirements will vary by the institution or college the student attends. For more information on IGRs go to: http://catalog.sdstate.edu/content.php?catoid=26&navoid=3057
- Major or Program Credits are the college courses that are required of the particular major or program the student intends to complete. These courses typically fall within a career or field of study, with the number of credits required determined by that major or program.
Selective Credits are college credits applied to graduation and account for any courses 100-level and above that do not meet a specific (general education, major, college, etc.) graduation requirement.

Students will complete approximately 35 credits in system general education and institutional graduation requirements. Many academic programs require at least 60 credits in major or program requirements. Please note that this number varies by academic program; careful understanding and planning of major or program requirements is necessary. Programs vary greatly in the amount of elective coursework with an average of about 25 credits; this provides students an opportunity to explore other fields of study and interests and to add a minor or even a second major. Chart 1 below illustrates how credits are typically distributed within an undergraduate degree.

**Chart 1: Distribution of Credits within an Undergraduate Degree**

A large number of incoming credits; however, does not in itself guarantee a shorter path to a degree! The curricular requirements of many programs are linked to the requirements and standards of professional accreditation. How (and whether) a student’s credits apply to degree requirements will determine the student’s time to degree. Although credits from the sources listed above may transfer to SDSU, those credits may not help to fulfill the particular requirements for a specific degree. For example, though a student may earn a substantial number of credits in a foreign language by satisfactory completion of the language placement test (and though satisfactory testing and the resulting credits in a foreign language certainly represent an admirable level of academic achievement), those credits will not significantly advance progress toward a degree if the student’s program does not require 1) foreign language proficiency and/or 2) elective course work.
Effective long-range academic planning and careful consultation with academic advisors are essential! A student aiming to complete a degree in a condensed timeframe will need to know early what major/degree he or she wants to complete and must take appropriate course work, even while in high school. Take advantage of the tools available through your high school to increase understanding of how interests and skills may match careers and to further explore those careers and others. Students may also want to explore the majors available at SDSU through the online catalog. Students enrolled through SDSU’s high school concurrent or dual credit program can also access FOCUS 2, an online tool that will help students make informed decisions about majors, education and careers through SDSU’s Office of Career Development.

Students will be most likely to complete a degree in a condensed timeframe if they follow their structured, selected path and avoid changing courses, programs, or majors. For example, if a student starts his or her college career in the Construction Management major and later switches to History, this will likely disrupt the student’s ability to complete a degree in a condensed timeframe. The courses required to fulfill the Construction Management degree differ greatly than the requirements for History; additional coursework will be required. A student on a condensed timeframe should also consider the impacts of that goal on co-curricular activities and opportunities for academic enrichment, including study abroad, internships, membership in student clubs or student government, service learning, honors curriculum, participation in research, etc., as well as eligibility for admission to graduate programs.

Students bringing in substantial credits may benefit in other ways as well. Students may find that their schedules will allow them to explore a variety of opportunities to enhance their college experience and academic career. Students may elect to add a second major, add minors, participate in a study abroad program, complete undergraduate research, an internship, or serve in a leadership role in student clubs/organizations. They also may have the opportunity to participate in a variety of experiential learning opportunities and complete the Experiential Learning Certificate through the College of Arts and Sciences. All of these options can provide students with a well-rounded educational experience and the development of a variety of skills that will be beneficial with a student’s career, volunteer work, family, and as a member of society.