

ABOUT THE CATALOG

The 2026-2028 Cal Poly Catalog

The *Cal Poly Academic Catalog* is published by the Office of the Registrar.

Academic terminology and a university catalog can be confusing to someone first entering the University. This section explains some of the jargon you will quickly come to know and explains briefly how the catalog is organized.

Guide to Using the Catalog

Colleges and Departments

The faculty who supply instruction at Cal Poly hold positions in academic departments, which in turn are grouped into Colleges. All the academic programs offered by the University are described in the catalog. A complete listing of academic programs at Cal Poly may be found on the Programs (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/programs/>) page.

In the catalog, Colleges are listed in alphabetical order. Departments are also arranged alphabetically within their respective College.

Degrees

A **degree** is an academic rank which the University confers on a student who satisfactorily completes a designated curriculum, or program of study. Cal Poly grants undergraduate degrees – also called bachelor's or baccalaureate degrees – as well as master's degrees.

At the undergraduate level, Cal Poly grants the following:

- Bachelor of Arts (BA)
- Bachelor of Science (BS)
- Bachelor of Architecture (BArch)
- Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
- Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (BLA)

At the graduate level, Cal Poly grants the following:

- Master of Arts (MA)
- Master of Science (MS)
- Master of Agricultural Education (MAgEd)
- Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- Master of City and Regional Planning (MCRP)
- Master of Public Policy (MPP)

Majors

A **major** is a program of study that provides students with the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to pursue a specific career or advanced study and leads to an undergraduate degree in that subject. Each major is offered in an academic department or program.

Undergraduate applicants to Cal Poly select a major at the time they apply for admission.

General requirements for bachelor's degrees are outlined in General Requirements - Bachelor's Degree (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/academic-standards-policies/general-requirements-bachelors-degree/>) and for master's degrees in Graduate Education (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/graduate-education/>). The specific requirements for a particular major degree program are listed under the academic department or program that offers the major.

The curriculum display for each bachelor's degree program shows courses arranged by *Major, Support, General Education* and *Electives*. These curriculum displays are useful guides, but students should consult with their academic advisors.

Information regarding academic advising is available on the Academic Advising (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/welcome/academic-services-programs/academic-advising/>) page.

Courses

Descriptions of Cal Poly courses are in Courses (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/courses/>), arranged alphabetically by subject area with its corresponding course prefix (an abbreviation that represents the subject or offering department). The courses in a bachelor's degree curriculum are identified as *Major Courses, Support Courses, General Education*, and *Electives*.

Major Courses are designed to provide competence in the professional field in which a degree is earned. They are usually offered by the academic department in which the degree program is offered, but they may include courses from other departments.

Approved Electives are courses that students can choose from within the parameters set by their departments.

Support Courses provide background needed for major courses and are offered by departments other than the department in which the major is offered. For example, most majors in engineering and in the sciences require support courses in mathematics. Some degree programs do not include support courses.

General Education (GE) courses provide a common foundation of knowledge for all undergraduate programs. GE requirements are described in detail on the General Education (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/academic-standards-policies/general-requirements-bachelors-degree/>) page.

Free Electives are courses that students can choose simply to pursue their own interests.

Prerequisites are one or more courses that must be completed, or other knowledge, skills, or standards that must be demonstrated, before a student is permitted to take certain courses. Prerequisites (if any) for a course are listed in the course's description in the catalog.

Some prerequisites have their own prerequisites, forming a string of courses that must all be taken. The catalog course description shows the last course in the prerequisite string of courses.

Statements in the catalog course descriptions may also contain the words "**concurrent**" which means that two or more courses must be taken in the same term or "**corequisite**" which means that the course or courses may be taken prior to the course being described (prerequisite) or in the same term (concurrent).

If a student does not meet a requisite as outlined in a course's description, but can demonstrate to an instructor that they have the necessary knowledge or skills through alternative means, then the instructor may grant the student permission to enroll in the course.

Crosslisted courses are shared by two or more academic units and have identical titles, descriptions, units, modes of instruction and prerequisites. They are interchangeable for degree requirements. They cannot be repeated for degree credit under separate prefixes. Example: HNRS 1261/ MATH 1261 Calculus I.

Selected Advanced Topics (4470s) are generic courses that offer special topics on an "as needed basis." The specific topic appears in the Schedule of Classes and on the students' transcripts.

Topic courses are shown in the catalog with generic titles and are repeatable with different topics. Specific topic subtitles appear in the Schedule of Classes and on students' transcripts. Example: ENGL 4439 Topics in British Literature, repeatable to 12 units with different topics (e.g., Jane Austen Fiction & Film, Orwell, James Joyce).

Other statements in the course descriptions include, "**total credit limit**" (total number of units students can take a course for credit).

Course Numbering System

Courses are generally numbered according to the plan shown below.

- 0001–0999 Pre-baccalaureate courses that are not for degree credit.
- 1000–2999 Courses primarily for first year and second year students.
- 3000–3999 Courses primarily for advanced undergraduate students with prerequisite coursework.
- 4000–4999 Courses for advanced undergraduates. Certain 400-level courses can be used in graduate programs. See General Policies (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/graduate-education/#generalpoliciesgoverninggraduatestudies>) for Graduate Education.
- 5000–5999 Graduate courses.

Credit Hour

On July 1, 2020, the United States Department of Education changed its definition of the student credit hour. Fundamentally, the change shifted responsibility for credit hour compliance to the accreditation agency and/or to the state.

As such, the CSU's accreditor, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (<https://wascsenior.app.box.com/s/ymq3a07t8x5dz15p7s97/>) (WSCUC), has published its own updated definition of student credit hour and related accreditation processes. The new regulations no longer require an accrediting agency to review an institution's credit hour policy and procedures. They do require WSCUC to review the institution's definition of credit hour and an institution's processes and policies for ensuring the credit hour policy is followed.

The CSU credit hour definition is consistent with federal law (600.2 and 600.4 revised July 1, 2020) and the requirements of WSCUC. The CSU defines a credit hour as an amount of work represented in stated learning outcomes and verified by evidence of student achievement. Such evidence is an institutionally established equivalency that:

1. Approximates not less than:
 - a. One hour of direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks for one semester hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or
 - b. At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph 1.a. of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours; and

2. Permits an institution, in determining the amount of work associated with a credit hour, to take into account a variety of delivery methods, measurements of student work, academic calendars, disciplines, and degree levels. Institutions have the flexibility to award a greater number of credits for courses that require more student work.

As in the past, a credit hour is assumed to be a 50-minute (not 60-minute) period. In some courses, such as those offered online asynchronously, in which "seat time" does not apply, a credit hour may be measured by an equivalent amount of work, as demonstrated by student achievement.

For purposes of accreditation, all CSUs are required to develop, communicate and implement procedures for regular, periodic review of this credit hour policy to ensure that credit hour assignments are accurate, reliable and consistently applied. WSCUC published new draft guidelines that took effect in June 2021. Universities are responsible for publishing a clearly stated practice or process that ensures they are in compliance with the student credit hour definition.

Cal Poly's credit hour policy (<https://academicprograms.calpoly.edu/content/academicpolicies/credit-hour/>) is based on Academic Senate Resolution AS-922-21 (https://content-calpoly-edu.s3.amazonaws.com/academicsenate/1/images/AS-922-21_0.pdf) "Resolution on How Credit Hour Policy Adherence is Assessed and Assured" (approved June 7, 2021).

Modes of Instruction

The mode of instruction is included in each course description; for supervision/independent study courses, no mode is indicated. Some courses have more than one mode of instruction.

Mode and number of hours classes meet each week

Activity: 2 hours per unit of credit.

Laboratory: 3 hours per unit of credit.

Lecture: 1 hour per unit of credit.

Seminar: 1 hour per unit of credit.

Supervision/Independent Study: Courses involve independent work done by students under the guidance of the faculty and do not meet regularly in a classroom. 3 hours of independent study per week per unit of credit.

Concentrations

A **concentration** is a group of courses designed to provide specialized knowledge within a bachelor's degree program. Completion of a concentration is noted on the student's transcript, but not shown on the diploma.

Specializations

A **specialization** is a similarly specialized group of courses in a master's degree program. Completion of a specialization is noted on the student's transcript and shown on the diploma.

Minors

A **minor** is an integrated, coherent group of courses designed to give a student knowledge in an academic area outside of the major field of study. The minor is completed along with the requirements for the bachelor's degree. For more information and a list including available minors at Cal Poly, see Programs (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/programs/>). Completion of a minor is noted on the student's transcript, but not shown on the diploma.

Graduate Certificates

A **graduate certificate** is designed to provide a specialized area of study that meets the requirements for professional competence and to expand access to specialized knowledge. The subject matter is advanced and narrow in focus.

The programs are typically designed for working professionals who are seeking to advance their career opportunities by obtaining specialized knowledge in their field or in a new field. Completion of the graduate certificate program will be commemorated by a document bearing the University seal and signed by the program's college dean(s) and is noted on the student's transcript.

Semesters and Semester Units

Cal Poly's academic calendar consists of three semesters – Fall, Spring and Summer (see Academic Calendar (<https://catalog.calpoly.edu/welcome/academic-calendar/>)).

Cal Poly's **academic year** consists of Fall and Spring semesters.

The **university year** includes, and ends with, Summer semester.

Each course offered by the University carries a value in **semester units**, often referred to simply as units or credits.

To convert quarter units to semester units, divide by 1.5. For example, 6 semester units $\div 1.5 = 4$ semester units.

Changes of Rules and Policies

Although every effort has been made to assure the accuracy of the information in this catalog, students and others who use this catalog should note that laws, rules, and policies change from time to time and that these changes may alter the information contained in this publication. Changes may come in the form of statutes enacted by the Legislature, rules and policies adopted by the Board of Trustees of the California State University, by the chancellor or designee of the California State University, or by the president or designee of the university. It is not possible in a publication of this size to include all of the rules, policies and other information that pertain to students, the institution, and the California State University. More current or complete information may be obtained from the appropriate department, school, or administrative office.

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