

BA/BS Degrees in a Single Discipline - Developments and Issues

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The Division of Educational Programs and Resources is concerned about the increasing frequency with which campuses request adding BS degrees to existing BA degrees or vice versa in a number of fields, but primarily in the math and science disciplines. Doubtless, the reasons for this development are complex, and many are valid. This paper is intended to itemize the concerns of the Division of Educational Programs and Resources, suggest alternatives which should be considered before such proposals are made, and describe the issues that should be addressed in any proposal for authorization to award both the BA and the BS.

Both nationally and in the CSUC, there exist no commonly accepted definitions which would distinguish the bachelor of arts degree from the bachelor of science. For any discipline, examples may be found within and without the CSUC where similar curricula lead to the BA at one institution and the BS at another. Within the CSUC, Title 5 sets differential unit minima for majors leading to the BA or BS, and authorizes but does not mandate an additional total unit requirement for the BS. The Division of Educational Programs and Resources has generally sought to insure that curricula leading to the BS contained a science or mathematics component. Beyond these minimal guidelines, the choice of BA or BS degrees has been locally determined by individual departments and campuses in accordance with rationales which are uniquely their own. In this respect, it is important to point out that lacking uniform definitions, each campus which proposes offering both degrees needs to justify the need for both de novo--there are no prior or standard assumptions about what a BS or a BA is or the purpose served by one in contrast to the other.

Concerns Relating to the Offering of Both the BA and the BS by a Single Department

1. Resource Requirements

Typically, no new courses are required to revise a curriculum so that it has tracks leading to both BA and BS certification. But when the added program is a BS, as it usually is, the result is often a more substantial major in terms of the overall units taken in the discipline. This may require that sections be scheduled with greater frequency, thereby requiring more faculty time. The development of specialized tracks may also commit the department to offering some sections with greater regularity so that students will not be delayed in completing their objectives. While an academic rationale may indeed justify the resource commitment, the failure to recognize that such a commitment is being made prevents the kind of resource assessment suggested in EP&R 79-72-- namely the identification of foregone opportunity costs. The commitment is one which should be weighed against other campus priorities.

2. Loss of flexibility

When the addition of a BA or a BS requires that specialized tracks be developed, the result is generally more specialized curricula and a loss of flexibility for students. The elective component of the major or the degree is often eroded. The question of general versus specialized preparation, while not resolved, is worthy of consideration and debate before curricula are divided into such tracks.

3. Hierarchy

Many proposals for dual degree offering suggest that one degree will be more rigorous in its requirements than the other. The distinctions between the preeminent degree and the “second class” degree are generally acutely felt by students, and it is a matter of no small concern that a number of proposals suggest that the less rigorous program will prepare teachers and the more rigorous will serve as a preparation for graduate school and professional work. Such a rationale is not consistent with years of state and system efforts to upgrade teacher preparation. Moreover, distinctions based on graduate school or career tracks often assume that students have more control over their futures than may in fact be the case. Often, the more specialized the track, the more limited is the graduate in exercising his/her options.

Questions to be Addressed in Submitting Proposals for Dual Degree Authorization.

There exists a longstanding Trustee policy against degree proliferation which we are enjoined to uphold. In reviewing requests to extend the baccalaureate, we note that the rationale is often unconvincing and contradictory. For example, one argument frequently expressed is that providing several tracks under existing degree majors to meet the diverse interests and career goals of students makes the curricular delineation too complex. Yet, provision of multiple tracks -- even of varying unit requirements -- under a single degree major has for years been valid and useful. Campuses need to affirm when they request two separate degrees in a discipline that they considered this alternative as the last, rather than the first and only. The preferred and clearly non-proliferative route is offering a single, flexible degree which meets the diverse needs of students.

A solid academic rationale should underlie any request, and where such a rationale exists, it is important that the resource effects of the change be carefully evaluated. To ensure that the import of the request has been carefully assessed and that both the campus and this office have sufficient information on which to make decisions with regard to Academic Master Plan projection and degree approval, we have developed a series of questions for which answers and documentation should be considered by the campus before submitting an Academic Master Plan request and provided to this office at the time actual degree approval is sought.

1. What circumstances precipitated the department to request adding a degree designation? Do the reasons appear valid? What are the advantages?
2. What process did the department go through in reaching the determination that extending the degree is justified? What is the evidence that the request represents the last recourse rather than the first and only?
 - a. What is the general practice in the field? Does the pertinent accrediting agency have a preference?
 - b. Did the department ascertain whether a shift in type of degree (i.e., from BA to BS) would accomplish the aim stated under item 1 satisfactorily?
 - c. Did the department attempt to integrate the new curriculum (track) within the existing major by making the latter more flexible in meeting the diverse needs of students? Was a curricular model devised? Wherein was it inadequate?
 - d. Was thorough analysis conducted to determine the recourse impact of adding a degree (i.e., effect on course and section offerings, enrollments, faculty assignments, etc.)?
 - e. Does evidence exist that sufficient student demand exists for each track to warrant its implementation and continuation?
3. How does the campus propose to evaluate the cumulative effects of extending degrees in several disciplines? How does the campus anticipate allocating the resources necessary to ensure the viability of the new degree(s)?
4. Is the request consistent with overall campus criteria, guidelines, or policy covering the differentiation of degrees? If the campus has no criteria, it is urged to develop them as a precondition to approval.
5. Would students in any of the tracks be precluded from further graduate or professional study in the event they decide at a later time to pursue advanced study?