Academic Terms and Definitions

Degree Requirements
A degree is an academic title conferred on students who complete a unified program of study. Degrees vary according to the major program. JMU offers eight undergraduate degrees that incorporate course requirements unique to the degree and major discipline. Majors culminating in Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees share common sets of course requirements appropriate to the degree with specific distinctions.

Bachelor of Arts degree – The B.A. is distinguished by its humanistic emphasis. Students who complete a B.A. may satisfy the degree requirements by taking courses that advance their understanding of human culture through analysis of ideas; perception of differences; appreciation of art and creative products through understanding art forms, beauty, and symmetry; knowledge of theories and principles of form, substance, argument and philosophy; understanding of the interaction between language and culture; and achievement of linguistic competency in a second language.

Bachelor of Science degree – The B.S. is distinguished by its scientific emphasis. Students who complete a B.S. may satisfy the degree requirements by taking courses that advance their understanding of the use of scientific analysis, experimentation and the application of scientific principles and facts in solving problems; understanding of the crucial role of mathematical reasoning; and understanding analysis and techniques in comprehending problems in the natural or social sciences.

Lists of courses satisfying Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree requirements are available from the Registrar’s website.

Program of Study Components
A program of study, or course of study, refers to any set of courses and experiences identified by the university as satisfying the requirements of a program or program component for a student or students. The following terms describe programs of study at James Madison University.

Major – A coherent set of required and elective courses approved by the Board of Visitors and meeting state criteria that, when completed by a student, signifies a degree of preparation in a field or fields of study. The credit hour requirements for the major are set by the respective colleges and academic units and may not consist of less than 30 hours. A student must formally declare a major.

Minor – A cohesive set of required and elective courses that, when completed by a student, connotes knowledge and skills in a discipline, region or topic area, but not at the depth of a major. The minor is designed for students who are not majoring in the same area and typically requires between 18-24 credit hours, as set by the respective academic unit and college. A student must formally declare the minor for it to appear on the transcript of record. A minor is not required for graduation.

Concentration – A prescribed set of courses associated with a major or minor that is designed to focus a student’s course of study according to interest and/or career goals. A concentration is not a required component of all majors and/or minors. The student must formally declare the concentration for it to appear on the transcript of record. The concentration will be noted on the transcript only after the student graduates.

Cognate – A set of courses outside the major that is designed to complement other components of the student’s course of study and to support selected professional goals. A cognate is not a required component of a program. A student does not have to formally declare a cognate and it will not appear on the transcript of record.

Core – A defined group of courses within a particular major or minor that is required of all students completing that major or minor.

Track – A prescribed set of courses within a concentration. A track is not a required component of all concentrations. A student does not have to formally declare a track and it will not appear on the transcript of record.

Pre-professional Program – A defined set of courses or course options and requirements that serve as prerequisites to upper or graduate-level professional program components or courses. A pre-professional program may coincide with a major, minor or concentration, or it may be comprised by courses from two or more disciplines and concentrations.

Pre-professional Advisory Program – This program includes a set of recommended courses for students who wish to shape their undergraduate experience toward a related professional goal beyond the undergraduate degree, such as the pre-law, pre-medicine, pre-dentistry and pre-health programs. Pre-professional advisory programs appear on the transcript during a student’s undergraduate career, but do not appear on the transcript after graduation.

Pre-professional Licensure and Degree Program – This program must be related to a student’s major as part of a planned progress toward professional credentialing, such as the pre-professional teacher education programs. It creates a distinct set of knowledge or skills that qualifies one to practice in a particular area or work in a specific field. This designation appears on the transcript.

Professional Program – A defined group of courses or course options designed to prepare a student for a specific professional career, certificate or license. A professional program may coincide with a major, minor or concentration, or it may be comprised by courses from two or more disciplines and concentrations. The student must formally declare the professional program for it to appear on the transcript of record. The professional program will be noted on the transcript only after the student graduates.

Licensure Program – A set or sequence of courses and experiences required for a student to be eligible to obtain a license issued by an agency, group or professional organization.

Certificate Program – A prescribed set or sequence of courses that results in a student receiving a certificate issued by the university when the identified courses and experiences are completed satisfactorily and when all other conditions have been met in accordance with the definitions and policies governing certificates. These definitions apply to all programs of study except in cases where program nomenclature specified by the accrediting agency differs from the nomenclature stated by James Madison University.