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1. Types of Degree Programs

Degree (must be approved by USG and listed on the [Degrees and Majors Authorized website](#)): The degree indicates the level of education that students are pursuing or have completed. The USG [mission statement for comprehensive institutions](#) guides VSU's offerings:

"Comprehensive Universities, which offer a number of undergraduate and master's-level programs with some doctoral programs. Typically, associate-level degrees are not offered at comprehensive universities. Master programs at comprehensive universities are characterized as master's-dominant. While teaching is a core focus at all USG institutions, the emphasis on basic and applied research is heavier at comprehensive universities than state universities or state colleges, but not emphasized as heavily as research universities."

Valdosta State University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate, bachelor's, master's, educational specialist, and applied doctoral degrees. Currently, this includes the Associate of Arts (Core IMPACTS and Field of Study), Associate of Science in Engineering Studies, Associate of Applied Science in Dental Hygiene (with Wiregrass Georgia Technical College), Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Business Administration, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Science in Education, Bachelor of Science in Exercise Physiology, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master of Arts, Master of Accountancy, Master of Business Administration, Master of Education, Master of Social Work, Master of Library and Information Science, Master of Music, Master of Public Administration, Master of Science, Master of Arts in Teaching, Specialist in Education, Doctor of Education, Doctor of Public Administration, and Doctor of Nursing Practice. The degree and major appear on the transcript and printed diploma.



Major (must be approved by USG and listed on the [Degrees and Majors Authorized website](#)): A major consists of specified group of courses required for a particular discipline.

[Academic & Student Affairs Handbook §2.3.1](#): “A **baccalaureate degree** must contain **120** semester hours (exclusive of physical education activity/basic health or orientation course hours that the institution may require). A baccalaureate must require at least **21** semester hours of upper division courses in the major field and at least **39** semester hours of upper division work overall.” Some bachelor’s degree programs may require more than 120 hours, but a special request must be forwarded to the University System of Georgia for an exception.

Academic & Student Affairs Handbook §2.3.5: “Master’s degrees are established at a maximum of 36 semester hours. In some cases, the master’s degree may require fewer than 36 hours but not contain fewer than 30 semester hours.” A **graduate degree** must contain a minimum of **30** credit hours toward the major.¹ Some master’s degree programs may require more than 36 hours, but a special request must be forwarded to the University System of Georgia for an exception. The degree and major appear on the transcript and printed diploma. Other terminology used for major: program, academic program, program of study, course of study.

Double Major: A specialized program of study that allows a student to earn one bachelor’s degree with two separate majors. Students follow programs of study for the two areas, often within the same academic college. The student’s courseload may be more rigorous and additional credit hours are required. For example, a BA with a double major in English and history, or BBA with a double major in Accounting and Finance. Commonly accepted practices in higher education require a double major to complete around 150-160 credit hours.

2. Other Types of Degrees

Other types of degrees are designed to allow students to complete a degree or degrees in a slightly reduced time frame. These types of degrees may include a combination degree, a dual degree, or an accelerated program. These types of degrees need to adhere to the definitions and practices below:

Definitions and Practices

Double Counted Credits (or Shared Credits): Double counted credits may be used to allow a student to complete requirements in more than one degree program for fewer credit hours than would normally be required for two independently pursued degree programs. The courses and number allowed for double counting are preselected to ensure that there is no loss of integrity, quality, or coherence between the two degrees. Academic programs using double counted credits must provide a written justification to include:

¹ <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2024/01/2024PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf> p. 18



- purpose and benefits,
- evidence that the integrity and quality of each program is not compromised or reduced (no loss of fidelity),
- program admission requirements and eligibility,
- how students can meet the student learning outcomes of both programs, and
- a coherent course of study.

This justification must accompany the proposal and curriculum forms which are submitted through the governance process. The Academic Committee and, if applicable, Graduate Executive Committee, are charged to review the justifications with final approval by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The following commonly accepted practices in higher education and restrictions apply when using double counted credits:

- Undergraduate credit hours may not be counted toward a graduate degree.
- Graduate credit hours (master's and specialist's level) completed at VSU or another accredited institution of higher education for which a degree was awarded should not be counted toward a doctoral level degree.
 - An exception can be made for the Doctor of Education for which such credit is limited to 9 elective credit hours if approved by the graduate program coordinator and Associate Provost.
 - Also see [Transfer Credit policies in the Academic Catalog](#).

Any waivers to the above guidelines should follow the normal approval process and should detail how integrity, quality, and coherence of each program are preserved.

Combination Degree (or Combined Degree Program): A specialized program of study that allows a student to pursue more than one degree from an overlapping course of study. These types of programs are predetermined and often allow for a shorter time to complete due to sharing some coursework between the degree programs. This is feasible by double counting, or sharing credits. At VSU, these programs may be at the undergraduate or graduate levels. For example, a BA in English and a BSEd in Secondary Education could record content courses in one degree which may count as elective courses in the other degree. Students often begin their studies with the intent of finishing both degrees, and it requires prescriptive advising.

For combined degrees at the baccalaureate level, both undergraduate degrees should total 141-150 credit hours. The second degree must contain at least 21 semester hours of upper division course work beyond the courses required for the student's first major and general education requirements. If a program proposal allows a student to earn two bachelor's degrees in fewer than the 141-150 credit hour range, then the department should provide a strong justification for how each of the programs meets a sufficient depth of student learning as outlined in SACSCOC Section 9.



For combined degrees at the graduate level, a maximum of 9 credits may be double counted, or shared, between combination degrees but the overall total for both degrees should meet or exceed 60 unduplicated credits. For example, a student may complete two master's programs (which normally total 30 or more credits each) in 51 credits. Accelerated Degree Programs, defined below, are a type of combination degree. If a program proposal allows a student to earn two master's degrees in fewer than the 51 credit hours, then the department should provide a strong justification for how each of the programs meets a sufficient depth of student learning as outlined in SACSCOC Section 9.

Institutional Dual Degree: A specialized program of study that allows a student to earn two separate degrees concurrently, typically from different colleges or disciplines within the university. Students follow programs of study for two distinct areas. For example, a BS in Chemistry and a BBA in Marketing. Completing both degrees requires additional credit hours and requires more semesters of study. A dual degree differs from a combination degree because dual degrees do not allow for double counting of credits. Students must complete the requirements for each major as listed in the catalog, but there may be flexibility in applying the general electives toward both degrees. Commonly accepted practices in higher education require a dual degree that results in two bachelor's degrees to total 150-180 credit hours, and a dual degree that results in two master's degrees to total 60 credits hours.

Accelerated Degree Program (or Accelerated Program/Track/Option or "4+1"): An academically qualified student may, after recommendation by department faculty and approved by the VSU Graduate School, enroll in a limited number of graduate level courses which can be dual counted for both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. These programs allow students to complete two degrees in up to 30% less time than if pursued separately in sequence. VSU offers accelerated programs in the following: BA to MA Sociology, BS to MS Biology, BA Political Science to MPA, BA Spanish to MAT World Languages, BS to MS Criminal Justice, BS Organizational Leadership to MPA, BBA to MBA, BBA Accounting to MAcc. Each accelerated degree program has eligibility criteria listed in the VSU Catalog.

A maximum of **9** credit hours of graduate coursework may be double counted toward an undergraduate degree and a graduate degree for those master's programs requiring **30-35** credits. A maximum of **12** credit hours of graduate coursework may be double counted toward an undergraduate degree and a graduate degree for those master's programs requiring **36+** credits. The result should be at least 120 credit hours counted toward the undergraduate degree and at least 30 credit hours counted toward the graduate degree.

Second Baccalaureate or Master's Degree: A student may work for a second baccalaureate or second master's degree, and credits applied towards the first degree will be permitted to meet the second degree requirements, where applicable and appropriate (principally in the general education and/or major core requirement areas). Students must meet all requirements for the second degree in effect when work on the second degree is begun. Students who complete a



degree following one concentration or track within the major and desire to complete a different concentration or track within the same degree and major should reenroll as Non-Degree Seeking. Non-Degree Seeking students can complete the additional coursework but will not be awarded the same degree. For example, a student who completes the M.S.N. Nurse Practitioner track and receives the degree could return to complete the Psychiatric Mental Health track coursework, but VSU will not award another M.S.N.

3. Parts of Degree Programs

Minor: A minor is a set of courses within a major area of study, or a separate, distinct thematic area of study. [Academic & Student Affairs Handbook §2.3.1](#): “A minor must contain 15 to 18 semester hours of coursework with at least 9 hours of upper-division coursework.” General education courses cannot be counted toward the minor. A minor cannot be earned independently of a bachelor's degree. A student cannot declare a major and minor in the same discipline. A minor appears on the transcript but not on the printed diploma.

Concentration: A concentration is a group of courses representing a specialized area of study within a major and should account for at least 30% of the major requirements. Students can select a particular interest, and there should be enough unique courses to distinguish it from any other concentrations. Some concentrations may have special requirements for a final capstone, internship, or residence experience. For example, at VSU, the Bachelor of Arts with a major in English currently has two concentrations: (1) Literature and Creative Writing, or (2) Professional Practices. The Master of Arts in Teaching with a major in Foreign Language Education has two concentrations: (1) Spanish, or (2) French. Regardless of the descriptive term (specialty, emphasis, focus area, concentration) used in the academic catalog, in Banner, they are coded as concentrations. A concentration can appear on the student's transcript, but it must be manually entered by the Registrar's Office and is not an automatic process. Even if a group of courses is designated as a concentration in the catalog, it does not appear on the printed diploma.

Track: A track typically indicates there are two (or more) relatively independent paths of study within a single program (major) that may lead to a certain profession or field of research. Tracks may have a common core at the beginning but then students pursue different courses to satisfy their graduation requirements. A common use of tracks is to prepare students who are planning to attend graduate school versus those who will go directly to work/industry. Although the term track may be used in the academic catalog, in Banner, tracks are coded as concentrations. For example, at VSU, the Master of Education with a major in Educational Leadership has two distinct tracks, one for Higher Education and one for P-12 School Leadership which have separate learning outcomes and required courses. The Bachelor of Fine Arts with a major in Communications has two tracks: one in Organizational/Interpersonal Communication and one in Public Relations. It is possible to have concentrations within tracks. Even if a group of courses is designated as a track in the catalog, it does not appear on the printed diploma.



Option: An option is a type of alternative track of courses within a major. For example, at VSU, the Master of Arts with a major in English has a thesis option or non-thesis option as the culminating experience for the degree. Both options are available to students who are pursuing either of the concentrations offered in the degree. Although the term option may be used in the academic catalog, in Banner, options are coded as concentrations. Although slight differences exist, at VSU, the term option is used interchangeably for track. Even if an option is designated in the catalog, it does not appear on the printed diploma. An option does not appear on the transcript.

Certificate: VSU follows the USG definitions of certificates as listed below. Some certificates are listed on the [Degrees and Majors Authorized website](#) which means students can apply as a non-degree seeking student and earn the listed certificate. Non-degree seeking students are not eligible for financial aid. VSU does offer many internal certificates that are not listed on the Degrees and Majors authorized website, but students can complete as part of their degree. The [Academic & Student Affairs Handbook §2.3.8](#) states, “Embedded certificates, those certificates that are only awarded to a student upon completion of a degree and are a self-contained set of courses embedded in a major or stand-alone degree, do not require notification and are not listed separately on the Degrees and Majors inventory.” These certificates are manually entered by the Registrar’s Office on the transcript if requested by the awarding department, but they do not appear on the printed diploma.

USG guidelines state the following:² University System of Georgia institutions offer a variety of certificate programs. Many of these certificates are not associated with degrees, but are a prescribed program of study at the postsecondary educational level. The following guidelines are provided to assist institutions with the development of certificate programs.

- Certificates proposed and offered by an institution should be consistent with the mission of the institution.
- Certificates shall be consistent with degree programs offered by the institution.
- The institution offering the certificate will maintain enrollment and completion data as part of the students’ record.
- Certificates should be 9 or more semester-credit hours, but no more than 59 semester-credit hours.
- Certificates require that students meet the admission requirements of the institution and that the courses offered will not exceed the level of courses offered by the institution (e.g., a two-year institution may not award a graduate certificate).

The definitions listed below describe types of certificate programs in the USG. These definitions are the same as those used in reporting data to the federal government. In the definitions, pre-baccalaureate (undergraduate), post-baccalaureate (graduate), post-master’s, and post-first

² https://www.usg.edu/academic_programs/changes/certificates_guidelines



professional, refer to the level of courses in the curriculum, not the qualifications or background of the student.

- **Pre-Baccalaureate (Undergraduate) Certificates**
 - Fewer than 30 semester credit hours (less than one year). The degree acronym is CER0.
 - From 30 to 59 semester credit hours (at least one year, but less than two). The degree acronym is CER1.
- **Post-Baccalaureate (Graduate) Certificates**
 - Post-Baccalaureate Certificate – a certificate beyond the bachelor’s degree that does not meet the requirements for a master’s degree. The degree acronym is CERG.
 - Post-Master’s Certificate – a certificate beyond the master’s degree that does not meet the requirements for a doctoral degree. The degree acronym is CERM.
 - Post-First Professional Certificate – a certificate beyond the first professional degree. The degree acronym is CERP.

Certification/Endorsement: A certification or endorsement refers to non-degree programs approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). They consist of a set of discipline-specific courses that, upon satisfactory completion, make a student eligible to teach in new content area or earn a teaching certificate upgrade. Examples offered by the Dewar College of Education and Human Services include Gifted Endorsement, Reading Endorsement, K-5 Science, K-5 Mathematics, and School Library Media Certification. Students enrolled only for the endorsement are coded as non-degree seeking. A certification or endorsement does not result in the awarding of a credential on the transcript or a printed diploma, but students could complete the necessary courses for an endorsement as part of a degree program. For example, the Master of Education with a major in Instructional Technology has a concentration in P-12 School Library Media.

4. Other Options Not Yet Defined at VSU

The below definitions are provided by USG and SACSCOC; however, these pathways are not currently used at VSU. Potential for future collaboration exists.

Dual Academic Award: “An agreement by two or more institutions to grant dual academic awards is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and each institution grants a separate academic award bearing only its name, seal, and signature.” Although VSU participates in several collaborative academic arrangements, such as WebMBA, eLanguages, and GOML, the student’s home institution awards one degree. Future arrangements must be approved by USG and SACSCOC. [See [SACSCOC Policy Statement on Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#)]

General Definitions and Guidance for Degree, Major, Minor, Concentration, etc. at VSU



Joint Academic Award: “An agreement by two or more institutions to grant a joint academic award is one whereby students study at two or more institutions and the institutions grant a single academic award bearing the names, seals, and signatures of each of the participating institutions.” VSU currently does not participate in any collaborations or arrangements of this type. Future arrangements must be approved by USG and SACSCOC. [See [SACSCOC Policy Statement on Joint and Dual Academic Awards](#)]

Badges and Microcredentials: VSU does not currently offer any at this time. Were VSU to add any of these, they would probably be treated as a concentration or embedded certificate.

5. Summary of Credentials as Indicated on Transcript and Diploma

	On Transcript?	On Diploma?	Designated in Banner?
Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes
Major	Yes	Yes	Yes
Double Major	Yes	Yes	Yes
Combination Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dual Degree	Yes	Yes	No
Accelerated Degree	Yes	Yes	No
Minor	Yes	No	Yes, if declared by student
Concentration	Yes, if requested	No	Yes, if informed by department
Track	Yes, if requested	No	Yes, if informed by department
Option	Yes, if requested	No	Yes, if informed by department
Certificate	Yes, if requested	No	No
Certification/Endorsement	No	No	No
Badges and Microcredentials	TBD	No	TBD

6. Guiding Resources

SACSCOC [Resource Manual for the Principles of Accreditation](#), specifically:

Standard 9.1: Program Content

Standard 9.2: Program Length

Standard 9.6: Post-Baccalaureate Rigor and Curriculum

Standard 9.7: Program Requirements

Standard 10.7: Policies for Awarding Credit

Standard 10.8: Evaluating and Awarding Academic Credit



Standard 10.9: Cooperative Academic Arrangements
[SACSCOC Quality and Integrity of Educational Credentials Policy Statement](#)
[SACSCOC Credit Hours Policy Statement](#)
[SACSCOC Three-Year Baccalaureate Degree Programs Position Statement](#)
[VSU Determination of Credit Hours for Courses Policy](#)

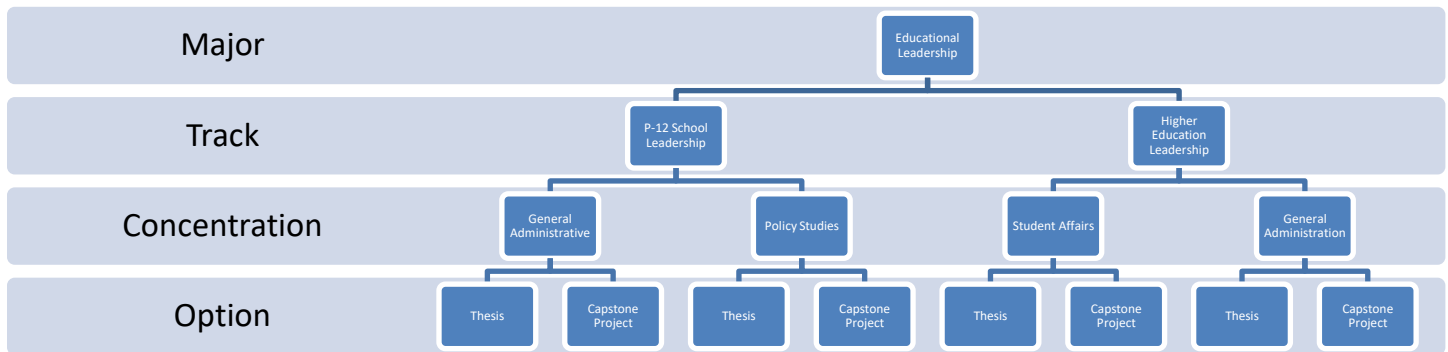
7. Stakeholder Contributions

Prepared by Academic Affairs: March 22, 2024, August 15, 2024
Stakeholder review Registrar's Office: March 25, 2024
Stakeholder review Deans' Council: April 10, 2024
Stakeholder review Council of Department Heads: April 30, 2024
Shared with Academic Committee: Sept. 9, 2024
Shared with Graduate Executive Committee: Sept. 19, 2024
Stakeholder review Doctoral Program Coordinators Subcommittee: Feb. 5, 2025



8. Appendix

Example 1



Example 2

