

# DEGREE FULFILLMENT

## The Bachelor's Degree

General Studies students earn a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA). The Bachelor of Arts combines breadth of study in a range of subjects and disciplines, represented by the core requirements, with specialization in a major field of study. Whether they major in the sciences, humanities, or social sciences, all undergraduate GS students receive a BA degree.

To qualify for a bachelor's degree, students are required to complete 124 points with a minimum grade point average of 2.0. The 124 points are distributed among three general categories: core requirements, major requirements, and electives. Students may not earn points for the same course twice (with the exception of certain fine arts courses and independent study courses). GS undergraduates are required to complete a major in order to graduate. See [Majors, Minors, and Other Programs of Study](#) for details about individual majors, minors, and special programs.

## The Major

All undergraduate GS students must fulfill the requirements for a major to qualify for a bachelor's degree from Columbia. The purpose of a major is to provide students with an opportunity to delve deeply into the study of a particular subject, developing expertise and critical thinking through sustained and advanced work. Students may declare their respective majors as early as their first semester at GS provided they have completed at least 45 points toward the degree, with at least 12 points in progress at Columbia. Majors are noted on the Columbia transcript. The declaration of a minor, concentration, or special program does not fulfill this requirement.

## The Minor

While most GS students graduate with one major, some students may opt to pursue a secondary program of study in the form of a minor. Minors are complementary, smaller programs of study that provide students an opportunity to focus some of their elective coursework in a particular discipline of interest. Some of the pedagogical goals of a minor are to:

- Serve as an introduction to a discipline without requiring advanced coursework
- Introduce students to a topic through a variety of academic/intellectual lenses
- Offer an advanced course of study for students who have preexisting foundational knowledge in a particular discipline (i.e., languages, foundational coursework in sciences, etc.)
- Complement major program of study
- Offer students the opportunity to engage in a course of study using an interdisciplinary approach

## Policies Governing Majors and Other Programs of Study

Students are encouraged to consider various fields of study and to become familiar with the requirements for a particular major before filing a major declaration. In most cases, students should begin coursework in the discipline before declaring the major. Faculty members are excellent resources for discussing possible majors. The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) is not only an expert in their field, but also in the programmatic requirements of a particular program of study.

They advise students who are considering declaring a program of study in their department, who have declared their program of study in their department, or who are taking courses in their program. Students might seek advice on some of the following questions:

- What are the central questions which drive study in this discipline?
- At the end of my program of study, what type of knowledge or skills can I expect to have acquired?
- What prerequisites will I need to pursue this program of study?
- What types of courses align with my academic preparation?
- What research opportunities are available to me within the department and in the field as an undergraduate?
- How do study abroad opportunities fit into the completion of my program of study?
- What academic and/or professional opportunities are available to me upon completion of this program of study?

Additionally, students may review departmental websites for detailed information on the requirements of the programs of study and courses. Many departments also have informational handouts for students considering programs of study in their departmental offices.

Academic programs offer relevant programming and events for prospective majors during the academic year. Students should plan to attend open houses to obtain more information about various majors from faculty and students in the programs of study. Such open houses are usually held in the spring term but often in the fall as well and are publicized through the GS Weekly newsletter and the [Departmental Open Houses](#) page. Students may also sign up for departmental/center/institute newsletters and listservs, which often provide information on upcoming events, updates on the curriculum, and opportunities to conduct research.

Students eligible to declare a major may do so during designated major declaration periods, typically during October and March. (Please note that a small number of programs require an application process and approval. For more information, please see the Programs Requiring Additional Approval section below.)

Students are expected to meet the requirements for the major as outlined at the time the major is declared. Students who do not complete the major requirements within five years of declaring may be expected to comply with any new requirements that have been subsequently established.

The following rules pertain to all majors; exceptions to any of these rules are noted by individual departments on their official websites:

1. No course with a grade of D will be credited toward the major.
2. No course with the mark of P (Pass) will count toward the major.
3. No more than two courses may overlap with GS core requirements.  
**Note:** even if a student declares a second major or secondary program of study, the total limit for overlapping courses between any major or secondary program of study and the core is two.
4. Students must check with departments for permission to count summer session classes and courses taken while studying abroad toward the major, minor, or special program.

5. Departments and programs have discretion regarding which, if any, GS-approved transfer credits can be used to fulfill major, minor, or special program requirements.
6. Students must submit all relevant paperwork to a department for consideration of transfer credit towards the major, minor, or special program in the same semester in which the program of study is declared; failure to meet this deadline may result in the loss of eligibility to transfer credit toward the program.
7. At least 18 points of coursework toward the major must be taken at Columbia.
8. Students who have not declared a major prior to completing 90 credits will be placed on registration hold and be subject to an academic warning.

## Double Majors and Other Programs of Study

Most students graduate with one major and use their elective coursework to explore a variety of interests. Some students opt to pursue additional programs of study. GS students have the option to declare a second major, a minor, or a special program.

- Students can declare a maximum of three total programs of study. Students must declare one major but they may not declare more than two majors.
- Students choosing to declare two or more programs of study (major, minor, and/or special program) should have a strong academic record and clear academic reasons for pursuing the additional program(s) of study.
- Students must declare a major program of study and can declare a secondary program at the same time or subsequently. (They may not declare a secondary program of study before declaring a major.)
- Students who wish to pursue multiple programs must declare these programs prior to completing 90 points toward the degree, and must have a minimum GPA of 3.2.
- Students cannot declare two programs owned by the same department. For example, a student may not declare programs in Russian Language and Culture and in Slavic Studies, both of which are owned by the Department of Slavic Languages; similarly, a student may not declare programs in Mathematics and in Applied Mathematics, both of which are owned by the Department of Mathematics. All combined majors (e.g., Economics-Political Science) will be considered as owned by both offering units, so that a student may not, for example, major in both Political Science and Economics-Political Science nor can they major in both Psychology and Neuroscience & Behavior (which is co-owned by the Departments of Psychology and Biological Sciences).

### For Students Who Matriculated Prior to Fall 2024

Students who matriculated prior to Fall 2024 may have already declared or intend to declare a concentration. These programs of study are being phased out of the curriculum for GS students in the 2024-25 academic year. Students who matriculated prior to Fall 2024 will still be able to graduate with these concentrations and declare concentrations if they so choose, but they must do so by May 2025. After that point, GS students will no longer be able to declare concentrations. Students who matriculate in Fall 2024 and thereafter may not declare concentrations.

Students who matriculated prior to Fall 2024 may have already declared or intend to declare a special concentration. Special concentrations that were developed in partnership with Columbia's professional schools or affiliated programs, e.g., in Business Management and Public Health, will be renamed special programs starting in Fall 2024. Other special concentrations will be phased out and, in many cases, minors in these areas will be offered instead. However, as with the concentration, students who matriculated prior to Fall 2024 will still have the option to declare special concentrations in these areas but must do so by May 2025. Students who matriculate in Fall 2024 and thereafter may not declare special concentrations.

### Double Counting

Students who declare two programs may, in some cases, overlap requirements for the two programs. There are three scenarios in which students may double-count program requirements; students may take advantage of any or all of these scenarios:

- If two programs both require the same coursework to teach fundamental skills needed for the field, those courses may be applied to both programs; specifically: (1) elementary and intermediate foreign language courses, (2) the calculus sequence (I through IV, or Honors A and B), (3) introductory courses in Statistics (STAT UN1101 INTRODUCTION TO STATISTICS or STAT UN1201 CALC-BASED INTRO TO STATISTICS), and (4) the introductory course in computer programming (COMS W1004 Introduction to Computer Science and Programming in Java).
- Students may also apply a maximum of two courses to both programs, if each course is already approved toward the fulfillment of the student's two declared programs. Offering departments, institutes, or centers may choose to restrict the double-counting of particular courses, and such restrictions cannot be appealed.
- As with students with one declared program, the maximum number of courses students with two declared programs may overlap to the Core is two. Students may not overlap core courses with both of their programs (triple-counting).

## Transfer Credit Toward the Major and Other Programs of Study

The DUS in each department is authorized to accept GS-approved transfer credits toward the major, minor, and/or special program, as they deem appropriate. Students must check individual department policies concerning transfer credits. Credits from other institutions of higher education do not automatically transfer—and in some cases are not approved—toward the Columbia major or other Columbia programs of study, although they may count as electives or core requirements.

It is the student's responsibility to discuss with the DUS the possibility of counting transfer credits toward the major, minor, or special programs and to provide the department with all required documents. When reviewing transfer credits the DUS requires copies of official transcripts from the other institutions and often the syllabi for the courses in question (supplied by the student).

**Note:** As part of the transfer course evaluation, students must submit all relevant paperwork to the departments in the same semester in which the major or concentration is declared; failure to meet this deadline may result in the loss of eligibility for transfer credit toward the major or secondary program of study.

## Declaring a Major or Other Programs of Study

From anthropology to astronomy, from economics to ethnicity and race studies, Columbia offers over eighty majors across foundational disciplines in the liberal arts. We encourage you to explore the many fields of study in the Arts and Sciences. Whichever department you choose as your academic home, you will have the opportunity to develop your critical thinking, refine your research skills, challenge your intellectual presuppositions, and expand your cultural horizons. Many departments also offer a minor. See [Majors, Minors, and Other Programs of Study](#) for more information about majors, minors, and other programs of study and their requirements.

### Beginning the Major Declaration Process

GS students may [declare a major, and minor or special program](#) during designated periods. Please refer to the [GS Academic Calendar](#) for specific dates.

**Note:** Certain departments require additional approval beyond the online declaration form. For more information, see "Programs Requiring Additional Approval" below.

### Policies Governing Major Declaration

Students should declare a major after completing 45 points of coursework toward the degree. Students must formally declare a major program before completing 90 points towards the degree; double-majors or major and secondary program of study must be declared prior to completing 90 points. Students who matriculate with at least 45 transfer credits may declare their respective majors in their first term at GS as long as they have 12 points in progress.

Before declaring a major, students should read the information on majors and other programs of study on this page in order to understand the choices and policies relevant to these academic programs. Students may also consult with GS academic advisors, faculty members, department websites, and the department descriptions on the GS website when deciding on a major.

### Criteria for Declaring a Major

In order to declare a major students must meet the following criteria:

- Enrollment in at least one semester at GS with a minimum of 12 points completed or in progress
- Completion of at least 45 points toward the bachelor's degree (including transfer credit)
- Regular and satisfactory progress toward fulfilling the GS core requirements

Students who have completed 90 or more cumulative points without a major on record will be placed on registration hold and may receive an academic warning. Additionally, students who wish to make any changes to their declared major and/or secondary program of study must consult with their academic advisor.

### Using the Online Major Declaration System

The [online major declaration system](#) will be available on the first day of each major declaration period.

Students who use the system must declare at least one major and are limited to a maximum of two program selections (the second choice of program may be either a major or a secondary program of study).

Students will receive an email confirming their academic program and providing information about their department's practice for advising new majors.

Students with questions about declaring a major, or who experience any technical difficulties with the online major declaration system, should email [gsmajordeclaration@columbia.edu](mailto:gsmajordeclaration@columbia.edu).

### Programs Requiring Additional Approval

Students selecting a major from any of the departments listed below must complete the [GS Electronic Major Declaration Form](#) and obtain departmental approval (for contacts and additional information, please click on the departmental links listed below). Once approval has been granted, students should email the approval confirmation to their respective advisors to finalize the major declaration process.

- [Business Management](#) (special program): [More information](#)
- [Education Studies](#) (special program): In addition to using the online major declaration system, student must also complete [this application](#). Please see [this page](#) for updated information.
- [Comparative Literature and Society](#) (Heyman Center): [Application](#)
- [Medical Humanities](#) (ICLS): [Application](#)

Before requesting approval from the departmental advisor, students should create a plan of study based on the program's prerequisites, requirements, and course offerings, and bring this plan to the meeting with the DUS.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Can I take courses that may count toward my major prior to declaring the major?**

Many students enroll in courses that will count toward their major prior to officially declaring. This is a good way to receive an introduction to a major and to get an early start on some of the major requirements. However, students beginning major coursework before meeting with a departmental advisor should be aware of the following:

1. Most departments do not allow a student to count toward the major or secondary program courses in which the final grade earned is a "D" or a "P". (Exceptions are noted in departmental guidelines for the major.)
2. Some Columbia departments have restrictions on the number or kind of Barnard courses that will count toward the Columbia major, minor, or special program.
3. Some departments, like Economics, will not count courses taken out of sequence.
4. When in doubt, check the department website.

**What if I cannot decide among several different options?** Students are urged to schedule an advising appointment with their GS advisor to discuss their interests and options. GS advisors can help students navigate their many questions and options when exploring possible majors. Students are also encouraged to consult with peer advisors, fellow students, and graduate students for advice. However, the most reliable resources for major advising are offered by the academic programs themselves. Students are strongly advised to meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies or other designated faculty member to review major requirements. Students should also review program

websites often. Most departments and programs host open houses for potential majors during February and March; this information is provided in the GS Weekly newsletters and published on the [Departmental Open Houses page](#).

For tips on exploring majors and how a major may relate to a future career, visit the [Career Exploration](#) page.

#### **What if I am interested in a minor or special program?**

Students interested in declaring two or three programs should discuss the viability of this academic plan with their GS advisors. Secondary programs of study are optional but, if pursued, should be declared. Students who wish to declare a minor or special program must do so (along with their major declaration) before completing 90 points of coursework toward the degree. Prior to declaring a secondary program of study, students must declare (or have declared) a major. In some cases, students who have attempted two majors may choose, later in the process, to change the second major to a minor, if that program offers such an option.

#### **What if I want to pursue a double major?**

Students interested in declaring two majors should discuss the viability of this academic plan with their respective GS advisors. Students may also consider a minor in one area and a major in the other. Students who are interested in double-majoring must declare both majors before completing 90 points toward the degree; exceptions to this rule may be made if the student has already made significant progress toward completing one or both majors prior to official declaration.

#### **What happens if I do not declare a major?**

Students who do not declare a major by the time they have earned 90 points toward the degree will be placed on registration hold.

#### **What if I want to change my major, minor, or special program after one or both have been declared?**

Students should schedule an appointment with their GS advisor to discuss the reasons for any change in their academic plans and declared program(s) of study. The student and advisor will then complete the necessary paperwork to make such program adjustments. Students normally are not permitted to declare a new major after earning more than 90 points toward the degree; exceptions can be made for rare and compelling reasons. Students should follow a similar process for changing or dropping a minor or special program.

#### **Can any of my transfer credits count toward my major?**

1. Each department has the discretion to count GS-approved transfer credits toward the major. Approval by GS of transfer credit toward the degree does not mean that this credit will automatically count toward the major.
2. At least 18 points toward the major must be taken at Columbia.
3. Students should consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) about which transfer courses may count toward the major departmental requirements.
4. Directors of Undergraduate Studies usually require transcripts and syllabi to make decisions about whether transfer credits will count toward the major. Departments and programs typically limit the number of transfer courses they accept. The majority of requirements for the major or secondary program should be fulfilled through coursework taken at Columbia.

#### **Can courses taken as part of study abroad count toward the major, minor, or special program?**

Students who receive permission by GS to study abroad must obtain official approval from their program for any transfer courses to be counted toward the major, minor, or special program.

#### **Can summer term courses count toward the major, minor, or special program?**

Many departments have limits and restrictions regarding Columbia summer courses and the major and secondary programs of study. Students are strongly advised to check with their departments on such policies.

Any other exemptions to the above rules are clearly articulated on the GS website or on departmental websites.

## **Electives**

### **Professional Courses**

GS students are permitted up to four courses of professional studies coursework toward their GS degrees. "Professional studies" include graduate-level courses in law, business, journalism, or any of Columbia's other professional schools, as well as any comparable courses clearly professional in orientation. [Undergraduate cross-registration](#) in courses offered by Columbia's graduate and professional schools is restricted and requires special approval. Students registering for courses at Barnard, SEAS, or in the graduate or professional schools should be aware that such courses may be subject to registration policies specific to the program offering them and may present unfamiliar academic challenges.

GS students are not allowed to count professional courses in any of the professional studies programs offered through Columbia's School of Professional Studies toward the degree. Rare exceptions to this rule exist when a course is listed as an approved part of a student's major or secondary program of study (for example, Sustainable Development). Students are strongly encouraged to discuss such courses with their GS academic advisor prior to registering.

Any professional course that is listed or cross-listed as an undergraduate course in business, public health, international and public affairs, journalism, social work, or within a Columbia Arts and Sciences department is excluded from the four course limit. Any course approved by the major department/program to count for a major requirement will likewise be excluded.

### **Physical Education Courses**

The [Physical Education \(P.E.\) Department](#) offers a variety of courses in the areas of aquatics, dance, fitness, martial arts, individual and dual "lifetime" sports, team sports, and outdoor education which are available for academic credit. Since P.E. is a requirement for undergraduates in Columbia College and the School of Engineering and Applied Science, priority is given to CC and SEAS students when registering for P.E. classes. If space is available, undergraduate General Studies students are permitted to take courses in the Physical Education academic credit program. The grading in all physical education courses is Pass/Fail. Students who fulfill the attendance and participation requirement receive a Pass.

Normally students may take only one P.E. course per semester; enrollment in more than one P.E. course per semester requires the approval of the Director of Physical Education Programs, to whom students should submit a petition. GS students may count up to two points of Physical Education toward the degree requirements.

## Dance Technique Courses

A maximum of six (6) points of dance technique courses may count to the degree for GS non-dance majors. GS students registering for a dance technique class must register for at least one point. GS students may not register for a 0-point dance technique class.

## Non-Degree Credit-bearing Courses

Certain courses will specify whether course credit may be applied to the degree. In cases where course credit may not count to the degree, students must ensure that they have sufficient credits towards the Bachelor's Degree by the time they apply for graduation. For example: credit from **ECON GU 4995** Research Course does not count to the Columbia degree.

## Independent Study Courses

Students may count no more than 12 points of independent study toward the degree, and may register for no more than one independent study per term. If a student wishes to undertake an independent study program involving more points than the number permitted, he or she must have the approval of the Director of Undergraduate Studies and the GS Committee on Academic Standing.