

THE CURRICULUM

Bowdoin offers a course of study leading to the degree of bachelor of arts. Bowdoin students must design an education in the context of their own developing goals and aspirations and in relation to the College's vision of a liberal education, its distribution and division requirements, and the requirements of a major field of study. The College requires students to seek breadth in their education through a set of distribution and division requirements that stimulate students to navigate the curriculum in ways that encourage exploration and broaden students' capacities to view and interpret the world from a variety of perspectives.

To graduate, a student must also complete an approved major. The major program challenges students to develop a deeper understanding and self-assurance as independent and creative contributors to an area of study. Students choose a major, using the departmental, coordinate, or interdisciplinary approaches available at Bowdoin, as a way to engage a discipline in depth.

The College's curriculum introduces students to academic disciplines that bring conceptual and methodological traditions to bear in teaching disciplined inquiry, analysis, argument, and understanding. Throughout their four years, students build intellectual capabilities, self-confidence as independent thinkers and problem-solvers, and come to know the pleasures of discovering and developing proficiency in new areas of knowledge. A liberal education founded in both breadth and depth teaches students how to continue learning as the world changes and demands new perspectives, knowledge, and skills. All courses completed satisfactorily during the first two years count toward Bowdoin's general education requirements—the thirty-two credits required for the degree.

Designing an education is an education in itself. The most fulfilling liberal arts education cannot be fully planned before the first day of class because such mapping would not permit the many new paths for exploration that students discover as they learn about unfamiliar fields, find exciting questions and ideas, and uncover unanticipated interests and talents. Nor can a challenging education emerge if a student selects courses one by one each semester; a liberal education is much more than the sum of thirty-two credits. Bowdoin College permits a wide set of choices to enable students to broaden their views of the world and of their own talents and interests, and to deepen their knowledge and capacities. Designing an education thus requires self-examination, careful thought, substantial flexibility, some intellectual daring, and the wise counsel of academic advisors.

A vital part of the educational experience takes place in the interaction between students and their academic advisors. Each student is assigned a pre-major academic advisor at the start of the first year. The pre-major academic advising system is intended to help students take full advantage of the first two years at Bowdoin and begin to plan the remaining years. It provides a framework within which a student can work with a faculty member to make informed academic decisions. Such a partnership is particularly important during the period of transition and adjustment that typically takes place during the first year in college. Academic advisors make recommendations about courses, combinations of courses, or direct students toward other resources of the College. They may also play a role at moments of academic difficulty. The effectiveness of the system depends on the commitment of the student and the advisor. Students must declare their majors in the fourth semester of their college enrollment and afterwards are advised by faculty members of their major departments. Bowdoin maintains academic progress records that both advisors and students can access throughout the

student's career on the Polaris Degree Progress page (the student information system).

Academic Requirements for the Degree

To qualify for the bachelor of arts degree, a student must have:

- successfully passed thirty-two full-credit courses (or the equivalent);
- spent four semesters (successfully passed sixteen credits) in residence, at least two semesters of which have been during the junior and senior years;
- completed a first-year writing seminar; this should normally be completed by the end of the first semester and must be completed by the end of the second semester in college;
- completed at least one full-credit course (or the equivalent) in each of the following five distribution areas: mathematical, computational, or statistical reasoning; inquiry in the natural sciences; exploring social differences; international perspectives; and visual and performing arts—these should normally be completed by the end of the fourth semester in college (the end of the student's sophomore year);
- completed at least one full-credit course (or the equivalent) in each of the following three divisions of the curriculum: natural science and mathematics, social and behavioral sciences, and humanities (in addition to the required course in the visual and performing arts); and
- completed all of the requirements for an approved major.

No student will ordinarily be permitted to remain at Bowdoin for more than eight semesters of full-time work.

Distribution Requirements

Students must earn at least one full credit for a letter grade (unless the course is only graded Credit/D/Fail, i.e., some courses in theater and dance and music) in each of the following five distribution areas:

- **Mathematical, Computational, or Statistical Reasoning (MCSR):** These courses enable students to use mathematics and quantitative models and techniques to understand the world around them either by learning the general tools of mathematics and statistics or by applying them in a subject area.
- **Inquiry in the Natural Sciences (INS):** These courses help students expand their understanding of the natural sciences through practices associated with questioning, measuring, modeling, and explaining the natural world.
- **Exploring Social Difference (ESD):** These courses develop awareness and critical understanding of differences in human societies (such as class, environmental resources, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation). ESD courses build the analytic skills to examine differences within a society and the ways they are reflected in and shaped by historical, cultural, social, political, economic, and other processes.
- **International Perspectives (IP):** These courses assist students in developing a critical understanding of the world beyond the United States. IP courses provide students with the tools necessary to analyze non-US cultures, societies, and states (including indigenous societies and sovereign nations within the United States and its territories), either modern or historical.
- **Visual and Performing Arts (VPA):** These courses help students expand their understanding of artistic expression and judgment through creation, performance, and analysis of artistic work in the areas of dance, film, music, theater, and visual art.

First-year writing seminars, independent study courses, and honors projects do not fulfill any of the five Distribution Requirements. Further, these requirements may not be met by Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credits and may only be satisfied with courses taken at Bowdoin. These requirements should be completed by the end of the student's fourth semester in college. A course will be counted as meeting a Distribution Requirement if a student earns a grade of D or better; courses will only be counted if they are taken for a letter grade, though courses will count if they are required to be taken for a Credit/D/Fail grade. Students may not count the same course toward more than one Distribution Requirement. Also note that the requirement for completing a first-year writing seminar will only be met if the seminar is taken for regular letter grades.

Division Requirements

Students must earn at least one full credit from each of the following three divisions of the curriculum:

- **Natural Science and Mathematics (a)**
- **Social and Behavioral Sciences (b)**
- **Humanities (c)**

Like the Distribution Requirements, Division Requirements may not be met by Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate credits and may only be satisfied with courses taken at Bowdoin. A course will be counted as meeting a Division Requirement if a student earns a grade of D or better; courses will only be counted if they are taken for a letter grade, though courses will count if they are required to be taken for a Credit/D/Fail grade. With one exception, students may count the same course to meet a division and a distribution requirement. The exception is a course that is designated to meet the humanities division requirement and the visual and performing arts distribution requirement; students may not count such a course to meet both requirements.

The Major Programs

Students may choose one of six basic patterns to satisfy the major requirement at Bowdoin: a departmental major, two departmental majors (a double major), a coordinate major, an interdisciplinary major, a student-designed major, or any of the preceding with a departmental minor. The requirements for completing specific majors and minors in each department are presented in detail on the Departments, Programs of Instructions, and Interdisciplinary section (<https://catalogue.bowdoin.edu/departments-programs/>). Interdisciplinary majors are described here. (<https://catalogue.bowdoin.edu/departments-programs/interdisciplinary-majors/>) In certain majors, students declare a concentration, which is a focused course of study within a broader major.

Students should have ample time to be exposed to a broad range of courses and experiences before focusing their educational interests and so do not declare their majors until the fourth semester of their college enrollment. Normally, students are required to declare their majors before registering for courses for the junior year or applying to participate in junior- or senior-year off-campus study programs. Students declare their majors only after consultation with a major academic advisor(s). Since some departments have courses that must be passed or criteria that must be met before a student will be accepted as a major, students are encouraged to think well in advance about possible majors and to speak with faculty about their educational interests. Students may change their majors after consultation with the relevant departments, but they may

not declare a new major after the first semester of the senior year. Special procedures exist for student-designed majors; these are described below.

Departmental and Program Majors

Departmental and program majors are offered in the following areas:

- Africana Studies
- Anthropology
- Art History
- Asian Studies
- Biochemistry
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Classics
- Computer Science
- Earth and Oceanographic Science
- Economics
- English
- Francophone Studies
- Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
- German
- Government and Legal Studies
- Hispanic Studies
- History
- Italian Studies
- Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies
- Mathematics
- Music
- Neuroscience
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Psychology
- Religion
- Romance Languages and Literatures
- Russian
- Sociology
- Theater and Dance
- Visual Arts

A student may choose to satisfy the requirements of one department or program (single major) or to satisfy all of the requirements set by two departments or programs (double major). A student who chooses a double major may drop one major at any time.

Coordinate Major

The coordinate major encourages specialization in an area of learning within the framework of a recognized academic discipline. Coordinate majors are offered in digital and computational studies, education, and environmental studies. For a specific description of these majors, see here (<https://catalogue.bowdoin.edu/departments-programs/education/>) and here (<https://catalogue.bowdoin.edu/departments-programs/environmental-studies/>).

Interdisciplinary Major

Interdisciplinary majors are designed to tie together the offerings and major requirements of two separate departments by focusing on a theme that integrates the two areas. Such majors usually fulfill most or all of the requirements of two separate departments and usually entail a special project to achieve a synthesis of the disciplines involved.

Anticipating that many students will be interested in certain patterns of interdisciplinary studies, several departments have specified standard requirements for interdisciplinary majors; these are:

- Art History and Archaeology
- Art History and Visual Arts
- Chemical Physics
- Computer Science and Mathematics
- English and Theater
- Mathematics and Economics
- Mathematics and Education
- Physics and Education

For complete descriptions of these interdisciplinary majors, see here (<https://catalogue.bowdoin.edu/departments-programs/interdisciplinary-majors/>).

Student-Designed Major

Some students may wish to pursue a major program that does not fit the pattern of a departmental major, a coordinate major, or an interdisciplinary major. In such cases, a student may work with two faculty members to develop a major program that demonstrates significant strength in at least two departments. Such strength is to be shown in both the number and pattern of courses involved. A synthesizing project is required. Guidelines for the development of student-designed majors are available from the Office of the Registrar. Student-designed majors require the approval of the Curriculum Implementation Committee. Students must submit their proposals to the Curriculum Implementation Committee by December 1 of their sophomore year.

The Minor

Most departments and programs offer one or more minor programs consisting of no fewer than four courses and no more than seven courses, including all prerequisites. A minor program must be planned with the student's minor department no later than the end of the first semester of the senior year. A minor may be dropped at any time.

The following departments and programs offer a minor:

- Africana Studies
- Anthropology
- Arabic
- Art (Art History or Visual Arts)
- Asian Studies (Asian Studies, Chinese, or Japanese)
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Cinema Studies^a
- Classics (Archaeology, Classical Studies, Classics, Greek, or Latin)
- Computer Science
- Earth and Oceanographic Science

- Economics (Economics or Economics and Finance)
- Education
- English
- Environmental Studies
- Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies
- German
- Government and Legal Studies
- History
- Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx Studies
- Mathematics
- Middle Eastern and North African Studies
- Music (Music or Music Performance)
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Psychology
- Religion
- Romance Languages and Literatures (Francophone Studies, Hispanic Studies, or Italian Studies)
- Russian
- Sociology
- Theater and Dance (Theater or Dance)
- Urban Studies

- ^a This program only offers a minor.