

Building Academic Maps

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The exercise of building academic maps should begin with a discussion with the faculty governing body of the institution so that everyone understands that the process is not making any changes to the curriculum established by the faculty. The faculty may decide to engage in the actual process of building the maps or have staff build the maps and returned to the faculty for discussion and approval. The faculty should approve all academic maps.

Academic maps begin with the requirements established by the faculty and published in the institution's catalog or bulletin. These requirements are then reformatted into a **term-by-term sequence** of courses required to **complete the degree in two or four years**. This helps students understand how degree requirements **can be translated into a term-by-term registration plan**.

NOTE: THE MAPS WILL NOT BE EFFECTIVE UNLESS THE STUDENTS' PROGRESS AND COMPLETION OF MILESTONE COURSES ARE MONITORED AND FOLLOWED UP WITH PROACTIVE ADVISING.

Essential Elements

- Narrative explaining how to read and use this map and the consequences of not following it. Description of selected major or area of interest.
- List of specific courses by name (and code if used during registration) for each academic term resulting in a Two- or Four-Year Graduation Plan.
- English and mathematics in first term.
- Sufficient credits selected each term leading to graduation in two or four years. Typically, 15.
- Specific milestone course(s) or actions that must be taken in that specific academic term in order to graduate within two or four years.

Steps to Build Academic Maps

Organize a meeting with your academic advisors or with faculty teams and select a program and walk through these steps:

1. Select a format that is easy to read and understand. Strike a balance between ease of use and including too much information. There are many different formats selected by different institutions, and a web search will provide lots of examples.
2. Open institution catalog to the desired major and be sure to list the prerequisites for the major courses.
3. List any special conditions for admission to the major.
4. Sophisticated software and/or technology are not necessary; you can begin with paper and pencil.
5. Identify and list English and mathematics in the first term.
6. Identify and list major courses required in each term. Try to list three major or pre-major courses in the first year.

7. Identify the Milestone courses or actions by term. These are courses or actions that MUST be completed in that particular term in order to graduate on time.
8. Have the faculty determine how many times a milestone course can be dropped and/or failed (earned less than a required grade) before a change in major is required. Many institutions allow two attempts, but some allow only one and others as many as three.
9. Keep a running tally of Milestone courses by major, because many majors will require the same Milestone courses.
10. Examine each required course to determine if it also meets a general education requirement and/or any other institutional competencies.
11. Sequence the general education courses to be completed in four or six terms, depending on whether the map is for a two- or four-year program.
12. Highlight placeholders in terms where electives may be inserted. This allows the student to meet with a faculty member and/or an advisor to explore courses of interest. There will be opportunities for electives in even the most prescribed majors, e.g., engineering. However, caution is needed here as the more choices a student has, the higher the probability of the student enrolling in a course that does not count toward graduation.
13. Remember to schedule at least 15 credit hours per term to target graduation in two or four years. Don't be concerned about assigning 15 hours as there are good data showing that students at all levels of academic preparation perform better taking 15 hours than less than 15 hours.
14. List potential job titles and employment data for graduates in this field. There are free websites that will assist in this.
15. Evaluate and discuss at every step in the process and keep everyone informed.
16. Write a narrative explaining how to read and use the map. Have a range of students review the narrative. What might be very clear to us may not be clear to an 18-year-old right out of high school or an older student returning to school.
17. The maps are not complete until the appropriate faculty has approved each one.