

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Excerpt from 2022–23 Bryn Mawr College
Undergraduate Catalog

THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The Curriculum

The Bryn Mawr curriculum is designed to encourage breadth of learning and training in the fundamentals of scholarship in the first two years, and mature and sophisticated study in depth in a major program during the last two years. Its overall purpose is to challenge the student and prepare the student for the lifelong pleasure and responsibility of self-education and playing a responsible role in society. The curriculum encourages independence within a rigorous but flexible framework of distribution and major requirements.

The Bryn Mawr curriculum obtains further breadth through institutional cooperation. Virtually all undergraduate courses and all major programs at Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges are open to students from both schools, greatly increasing the range of available subjects. With certain restrictions, Bryn Mawr students may also take courses at Swarthmore College, the University of Pennsylvania and Villanova University during the academic year without payment of additional fees.

Requirements for the A.B. Degree for students who matriculated in the fall of 2011 or later (students who matriculated prior to fall 2011 should consult prior catalogs)
Thirty-two units of work are required for the A.B. degree. These must include

- One Emily Balch Seminar.
- One unit to meet the Quantitative and Mathematical Reasoning Requirement (preceded by the successful completion of the Quantitative Readiness Assessment or Quantitative Readiness Seminar).
- Two units to satisfy the Foreign Language Requirement.
- Four units to meet the Distribution Requirement.
- A major subject sequence.
- Elective units of work to complete an undergraduate program.

In addition, all students must complete six half-semester of physical education courses, including the required wellness class, THRIVE. They must also successfully complete a swim proficiency requirement and meet the residency requirement. Students will normally satisfy the Emily Balch Seminar, the Quantitative and Mathematical Reasoning Requirement, the Foreign Language Requirement, and the Distribution Requirement with courses taken while in residence at Bryn Mawr during the academic year. Students may use credits transferred from other institutions to satisfy these requirements only with prior approval. AP, A level, or IB credits may not be used to satisfy any of these requirements, although they might allow a student to place into a more advanced course.

Emily Balch Seminar Requirement

The Emily Balch Seminars aim to engage students in thinking about broad intellectual questions within and across disciplines and to teach close reading and cogent writing. The seminars help prepare students for a world that demands critical thinking and effective communication both within and outside of the frameworks of particular disciplines. Students must attain a grade of 2.0 or higher in the seminar in order to satisfy this requirement.

Quantitative Requirement

Students must demonstrate proficiency in the application of the quantitative skills needed to succeed in many social and natural science courses, not to mention their personal and future professional lives, by a) earning a satisfactory score on the SAT, the ACT, b) earning a satisfactory score on the Quantitative Readiness Assessment offered before the start of the freshman year, or c) completing a Quantitative Readiness Seminar with a grade of 2.0 or higher during the freshman year.

In addition, before the start of the senior year, students must complete, with a grade of 2.0 or higher, one course which makes significant use of at least one of the following: mathematical reasoning and analysis, statistical analysis, quantitative analysis of data or computational modeling. Courses that satisfy this requirement are designated “QM” in course catalogs and guides.

Students cannot use the same course to meet both the QM and distribution requirements. A student may use credits transferred from other institutions to satisfy these requirements only with prior approval.

Foreign Language Requirement*

Before the start of the senior year, students must complete, with a grade of 2.0 or higher, two units of foreign language at Bryn Mawr or Haverford College. Courses that fulfill this requirement must be taught in the foreign language; they cannot be taught in translation. Students may fulfill the requirement by completing two sequential semester-long courses in one language, either at the elementary level or, depending on the result of their language placement test, at the intermediate level. Students who are prepared for advanced work may complete the requirement instead with two advanced free-standing semester long courses in the foreign language(s) in which they are proficient. Students cannot use the same course to meet both the Foreign Language and distribution requirements. A student may use credits transferred from other institutions to satisfy these requirements only with prior approval.

* Non-native speakers of English who matriculated prior to Fall 2020 may choose to satisfy this requirement by coursework in English literature.

Distribution Requirement: Approaches to Inquiry

The course of study in the major provides students the opportunity to acquire a depth of disciplinary knowledge. In order to ensure exposure to a broad range of frameworks of knowledge and modes of analysis, the College has a distribution requirement that directs students to engage in studies across a variety of fields, exposes them to emerging areas of scholarship, and prepares them to live in a global society and within diverse communities. The aim of this distribution requirement is to provide a structure to ensure a robust intellectual complement to a student’s disciplinary work in the major.

Before the start of the senior year, each student must have completed, with grades of 2.0 or higher, one unit in each of the following Approaches to Inquiry:

1. Scientific Investigation (SI): understanding the natural world by testing hypotheses against observational Evidence. These are courses in which students engage in the observational and analytical practices that aim at producing causal understandings of the natural world. They engage students in the process of making observations or measurements and evaluating their

consistency with models, hypotheses or other accounts of the natural world. In most, but not all, cases this will involve participation in a laboratory experience and will go beyond describing the process of model testing or the knowledge that comes from scientific investigation.

2. Critical Interpretation (CI): critically interpreting works, such as texts, objects, artistic creations and performances, through a process of close reading. These courses engage students in the practice of interpreting the meanings of texts, objects, artistic creations, or performances (whether one’s own or the work of others) through close reading of those works.
3. Cross-Cultural Analysis (CC): analyzing the variety of societal systems and patterns of behavior across space. These courses encourage students to engage with communities and cultures removed from their own. Using the tools, methodologies and practices that inform our scholarship, students will develop a deeper sense of what it means to analyze or interpret a human life or community within a “culture.” A central goal is to overcome the tendency to think that one’s own culture is the only one that matters.
4. Inquiry into the Past (IP): inquiring into the development and transformation of human experience over time.

These courses encourage students to engage with peoples, communities, and polities existing in a different historical context. Using the tools, methodologies and practices that inform our scholarship, students will develop a deeper sense of what it means to analyze or interpret a human life or community in the past. The aim is to have students view cultures, peoples, polities, events, and institutions on their own terms, rather than through the lens of the present.

These approaches are not confined to any particular department or discipline. Each course that satisfies the distribution requirement will focus on one (or possibly two) of these Approaches. The distribution classifications can be found in the course guide and in BiONiC, and students should work with their deans and advisers to craft their course plan. Although some courses may be classified as representing more than one Approach to Inquiry, a student may use any given course to satisfy only one of the four Approaches.

Only one course may be used to satisfy both the distribution requirement and the requirements of the major. No more than one course in any given department may be used to satisfy distribution requirements.

The Major

In order to ensure that students’ education involves not simply exposure to many disciplines but also some degree of mastery in at least one, they must choose an area to be the focus of their work in the last two years at the College.

The following is a list of major subjects.

- Anthropology
- Astronomy (Haverford College)
- Astrophysics (Haverford College)
- Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology
- Classical Culture and Society

Classical Languages
 Comparative Literature
 Computer Science
 East Asian Languages and Cultures
 Economics
 Environmental Studies (Bi-Co Major)
 Fine Arts (Haverford College)
 French and Francophone Studies
 Geology
 German and German Studies
 Greek
 Growth and Structure of Cities
 History
 History of Art
 International Studies
 Latin
 Linguistics (Tri-College Major)
 Linguistics and Languages (Tri-College Major)
 Literatures in English
 Mathematics
 Music (Haverford College)
 Neuroscience (Bi-Co Major)
 Philosophy
 Physics
 Political Science
 Psychology
 Religion (Haverford College)
 Romance Languages
 Russian
 Sociology
 Spanish
 Transnational Italian Studies

Students must declare their major subject before the end of the sophomore year. The minimum course requirement in the major subject shall be eight course units, of which at least one course must be writing intensive (or the equivalent attention to writing in two courses) at the 200 or 300 level.

The declaration of a major is part of the Sophomore Planning Process. Students shall consult with the departmental adviser and complete a major work plan, which the student then shares with the dean.

Students may not choose to major in a subject in which they have incurred a failure, or in which their average is below 2.0. Students may double major with the consent of both major departments and their dean. Even when a double major has been approved, scheduling conflicts may occur which make it impossible for a student to complete the plan.

Students may choose to major in any department at Haverford College, in which case they must meet the major requirements of Haverford College and the degree requirements of Bryn Mawr College. Procedures for selecting a Haverford major are available from the Haverford Dean's Office website and are sent to all sophomores in the early spring.

An up-to-date overview of the Sophomore Planning Process and details about each of the components are posted on the Dean's Office website each fall.

Students working for an A.B. degree are expected to maintain grades of 2.0 or higher in all courses in their major subject. Students who receive a grade below 2.0 in a course in their major are reviewed by the Committee on Academic Standing and may be required to change majors. If, at the end of junior year, a student has a major-subject grade point average below 2.0, that student must change to a different major. If there is

no alternative major, that student will be excluded from the College. A student who is excluded from the College is not eligible for readmission.

Each department sets its own standards and criteria for honors in the major, with the approval of the Curriculum Committee. Students should contact departments for details.

The Independent Major Program

The Independent Major at Bryn Mawr may provide an option for students whose interests cannot be accommodated by an established major. An independent major is a coherent, structured plan of study consisting of introductory through advanced courses in a recognizable field within the liberal arts. It is not simply a combination of courses in several fields. Every independent major is overseen by two faculty members: the primary adviser must be a member of the Bryn Mawr faculty; the secondary adviser may be either from Bryn Mawr or Haverford. Students should keep the following in mind when considering an independent major:

- Students should seek advice early in the process. Most students meet with potential faculty advisers and their dean in the spring of the freshman year to share their interests and to begin developing plans.
- Students should have a back-up plan for an established major in case they cannot find faculty advisers or their independent major proposal is not approved.

The application for an independent major consists of the following components:

- A proposal that describes the student's interest in the proposed field of study. The proposal should explain why the student's interests cannot be accommodated by an established major, or a combination of an established major and a minor or concentration. It should identify the key intellectual questions the major will address and explain how each proposed course contributes to the exploration of those questions. The proposal should include possible ideas for a thesis topic.
- A course list of 11 to 14 courses, at least seven of which must be taken at Bryn Mawr or Haverford. The plan should include up to two courses at the 100 level and at least four at the 300 or 400 level, including at least one semester of a senior project or thesis (403). No more than two 403 courses can count towards the thesis. The proposal should include a list of five or six alternate courses.
- Proposal review forms from the faculty advisers that address the merits of the proposal, the course list, the student's preparation for the proposed course of study, and the process by which the student conferred with the advisers.
- A copy of the student's transcript.

The usual deadline is the end of the fourth week of classes in the spring of the sophomore year. On rare occasions, juniors apply for an independent major (to supplement or replace an already declared departmental major). The junior deadline is the end of the fourth week of classes in the fall of the junior year. Applications submitted after the junior deadline will not be considered.

All complete applications are reviewed by the Independent Major committee. The committee's decisions are final. The fact that a particular topic was approved in the past is not a guarantee that it will be approved again.

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The committee considers the following issues:

- Is the proposed major appropriate within the context of a liberal arts college?
- Could the proposed major be accommodated instead by an established major and minor?
- Does the proposal convey its intellectual concerns and the role each course will play in this inquiry?
- Are the proposed courses (including alternates) expected to be offered over the next two years?
- Will the faculty members be available for advising?
- Does the student's record predict success in the proposed major?

If the committee approves the proposal, the student submits an independent major work plan. The plan is reviewed and signed by the faculty advisers and the chair of the independent major committee. The committee continues to monitor the progress of students who have declared independent majors and must approve, along with the advisers, any significant changes in the program. A grade of 2.0 or higher is required for all courses in the independent major. If this standard is not met, the student must change to a departmental major.

Honors may be awarded for significant work in the field of the independent major. Criteria are a GPA of 3.8 for the courses in the major or an outstanding senior project (3.7 or 4.0) combined with a 3.5 major average. In this second case, honors are determined by the two major advisers and an outside reader/spectator. This third reader should be agreed upon by both the student and the major advisers.

Physical Education Requirement

The Department of Athletics and Physical Education affirms the College's mission by offering a variety of opportunities promoting self-awareness and the development of skills and habits that contribute to an ongoing healthy lifestyle. The Department offers a comprehensive program that includes competitive intercollegiate athletics, a diverse physical education curriculum and fitness and wellness programs designed to enhance the quality of life for the campus community.

All undergraduate students must earn six physical education (PE) credits to fulfill the College's graduation requirement, including completing a swim proficiency (1 credit) and THRIVE (2 credits). THRIVE is a first-year wellness program that must be completed in their first Fall semester at the College. Students may fulfill the swim proficiency by either passing the swim test or by completing an instructional beginners swim PE class. Students may earn the remaining PE credits as follows:

- PE classes (quarter classes=1 credits; semester classes=2 credits)
- Varsity intercollegiate athletics (2 credits for traditional season, credit is not awarded in the non-traditional segment)
- Club sport activities (.5 credit for satisfactory participation for approved clubs. No more than 1 PE credit per academic year for club participation. Club sports are sponsored through SGA and are organized by student chairs of each club.)

Qualified students may also earn credit for instructional independent study programs at Bryn Mawr by prior approval

only. (Two credits maximum). PE credit can be earned for certain dance classes in the Bryn Mawr Dance Department, providing the class is not offered for academic credit.

PE classes, except for independent study classes, can be taken at Haverford College. Students are expected to complete all aspects of the PE requirement before Spring Break of their sophomore year. Failure to meet these expectations will be reported to the Dean's Office.

McBride and Transfer Students

For the purposes of the PE requirement, McBride students are treated as either sophomore or junior transfer students, depending on their academic status. All transfers must complete the swim proficiency requirement by either completing the swim proficiency test or by completing a swim class at Bryn Mawr College. Sophomore transfer students must also complete 3 credits of PE from the general requirements. Junior transfer students must complete 1 credit of PE from the General Requirements. For specifics on credit allocation and policies regarding what programs satisfy PE requirements, students and advisers are encouraged to reference the Physical Education Website: gobrynmawr.com/information/physical_education/requirements

Residency Requirement

Each student must complete six full-time semesters and earn a minimum of 24 academic units while in residence at Bryn Mawr. These may include courses taken at Haverford and Swarthmore Colleges and the University of Pennsylvania during the academic year. Exceptions to this requirement for transfer students entering as second-semester sophomores or juniors are considered at the time of matriculation.

The senior year must be spent in residence. Seven of the last 16 units must be earned in residence. Students do not normally spend more than the equivalent of four years completing the work of the A.B. degree.

Exceptions

All requests for exceptions to the above regulations are presented to the Special Cases Subcommittee of the Committee on Academic Standing for approval. Normally, a student consults the dean and prepares a written statement to submit to the Committee.

Commencement Participation

The College holds a Commencement Ceremony every May to honor students who have finished their degrees and those who are on track to finish in August and December. To participate, students present a viable plan to the Registrar early in the spring semester demonstrating that they will complete all degree requirements by the upcoming May, August or December. In addition, students who finish degrees in August and December who chose not to participate the previous May are invited to celebrate their completion at the following May Commencement instead.