

The University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Proposal 22-26

Proposal for a Policy on Concentrations in Degree Programs

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Rationale:

Concentrations within Degree Programs were initially defined by proposal 15-11. However, this proposal did not include any specific credit limitations other than a maximum on total degree credits. Additionally, there are no guidelines on the standardization of core degree requirements. This has resulted in a range of concentration sizes (from 7 to 48 credits), instances where students can earn "the same" Enterprise concentration with different credit and course requirements, and cases where the "core" degree requirements differ between concentrations within the same degree. In another case, courses were so similar between concentrations that a student could take 18 credits and earn any of the concentrations.

In addition to the issues above, the Higher Learning Commission defines a concentration as follows. This proposal would align our definition with the HLC's.

"A program concentration (or specialization, track or emphasis) involves less than half of the total hours in the program of which it is a part, with the remaining hours taken in common by all students in the program."

This proposed policy would supersede proposal 15-11.

Timeline:

Existing majors with concentrations should be reviewed and, if needed, revised through the annual curriculum update process or shelved during the 2026-27 academic year.

Policy Proposal:

Concentrations can be viewed as areas of specialization designed for a specific major. They often rely on built-in pre-requisite chains and disciplinary knowledge that would be unreasonable to expect a student from a different major to meet. As such, the purpose of a "Concentration in Degree Program" is to officially recognize a student who successfully completes a prescribed set of courses in a specialization within their major.

Concentrations will be noted on the official transcript.

Concentration Requirements:

A major and all of its variations that include concentrations must:

- share an identifiable set of core requirements.

- “Core requirements” include all credits defined outside of the concentration, other than electives and the Essential Education requirements, regardless of how course lists are named.
- The number of required electives (e.g., technical, approved, selected lists) may vary.
- Available free elective credits may vary.
- have the same minimum credits required for the degree.

Concentration design requirements:

- Concentrations will be a minimum of 15 credits and cannot require more than 50% of the total credits for the degree.
- Concentrations may not require more credits than the major’s minimum core requirements (as defined above).
- Concentrations within a major must be distinctive from each other and designed so that the same set of courses would not meet the requirements of multiple concentrations.
- A concentration that has the same name, but exists in multiple majors, must have the same requirements across majors.

Concentration Proposals and Approvals:

Concentrations must be approved by the University Senate, following existing policy and procedure for academic programs. Additional approval steps may be required by the Provost’s Office.

New Majors/Degree Programs with Concentrations:

- Proposals for new programs may include/define multiple concentrations as part of a single proposal.
- These proposals would follow requirements for new degree programs.

Adding Concentrations to Existing Majors/Degree Programs:

- Proposals to add one or more concentrations to an existing degree program may be done as a single proposal.
- These proposals would follow requirements for new non-degree programs.

Shelving and Eliminating Concentrations:

- Proposals to shelve or eliminate a concentration will follow Senate Procedure 414.1.1.

Term Distinctions:

Focus areas and technical areas of emphasis (and other such informal terms) are groups of courses within a major designed to guide students to suites of classes that are topically related.

Focus areas and technical areas of emphasis are approved through the annual curriculum process, do not require Senate approval, and they differ from concentrations, as they do not appear on transcripts.

Historically (pre-2000), concentrations were referred to as “options”. The term “option” may be used similarly to focus area or area of emphasis.

To avoid confusion, only concentrations as defined in this policy may use the term “concentration” to describe a specialization area within a degree program.