

# Selecting the Right Course

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers course selection, and the factors you must consider to choose the right course. Here is what will be discussed:

1. Types of Courses: General Education, Required, Elective
2. The Role of an Academic Advisor
3. Reading Course Descriptions
4. Researching Basic Course Information

## 1. Types of Courses: General Education, Required, Elective

When you choose courses, you need to think about which courses you want to take and which courses you have to take. Typically, there are three types of courses you'll be considering: general education courses, courses required for your degree program, and elective courses.

General education courses are those "core requirements" that every student has to take, regardless of their major or particular course of study. They will vary from school to school, but often general education courses are in the same broad major subjects that you studied in high school-English, Math, Science, etc.

The next category includes courses that are required to complete your chosen degree program; for instance, if you are pursuing a degree in philosophy, you might have to take PHIL 3200: The Enlightenment.

Finally, the courses that you take simply because you want to, not because you are required to, are called elective courses because you elect to take them. If you are a computer science major but you have room in your schedule and you are really interested in that philosophy course on The Enlightenment, it would be an elective course for you.

## 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE ENROLLING



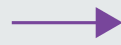
DOES IT **INTEREST** YOU?



Ideally, the answer to this question should be "yes!"



WILL IT FIT WITH YOUR **SCHEDULE**?



Check your schedule to make sure you can be present for classes.



WILL IT HELP YOU **GRADUATE** ON TIME?



Check the number of credits for the class and the credit requirements for completing your program.



IS IT A **REQUIREMENT** FOR YOUR DEGREE OR PROGRAM?



Make the requirements for your degree or program a priority over others.



CAN YOU HANDLE THE **WORKLOAD**?



If you have doubts, it may be worth the effort to track down the syllabus.

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## 2. The Role of an Academic Advisor

If the process of choosing the right courses and understanding the courses you need to take seems daunting or overwhelming, there is no reason to panic. There are professionals whose job it is to help you with these kinds of issues. They are typically called *academic advisors*, and their role at an institution of higher learning is to consult with students in order to help them develop short and long-term plans and goals. An advisor will know about or be able to find out about different sets of requirements for the programs you are interested in and registration procedures. They may also have information and advice about particular courses or instructors, and they will have valuable experience working with students in your situation. Advisors can be a great resource for a student looking for help with selecting a course, so don't hesitate to seek their assistance.

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## 3. Researching Basic Course Information

After you've read a course description and carefully considered factors like whether a course fits into your schedule or whether it will be useful in satisfying the requirements of your degree, there is even more you can do to learn about a course in order to help you make your decision. You might see if you can find a syllabus online from when the course was offered in the past, so you can investigate the workload and the kinds of work that is assigned in the course.

Another good idea is to find out as much you can about the instructor, since they will play a significant part in whether you have a positive experience with the course. The instructor might have a webpage, either through their academic department or elsewhere, which includes vital personal and professional details about them. There are also internet sites where students anonymously review their instructors; though another student's experience won't necessarily match up with yours, these sites can be an interesting way to gauge popular opinion about an instructor.



## SUMMARY

This tutorial has detailed **the process of selecting courses** by explaining the meaning of **course levels**, defining **prerequisites**, describing the different **types of courses**, highlighting the role of **academic advisors**, and relaying the value of reading **course descriptions** and **other basic research about courses** that you might conduct.