

UK/US Academic Glossary

U.S. Definition

British Definition

Degrees

Associate – a two year degree

No equivalent terminology at all for degree level program. “Diploma” (if full time) or “certificate” (if part time) terms used for non-degree programs.

Baccalaureate/Bachelor’s – a four year degree

A three year degree (four if practical training is included) usually the result of nine terms of academic study plus a comprehensive diet of final exams. Commonly referred to as a first degree.

Master’s – a degree sought after completion of bachelor’s degree. Usually completed in 2-3 years.

Essentially same as U.S. may be completed in one year, rarely takes as long as three.

Doctorate – a terminal degree program

Essentially the same as U.S. In many institutions one is initially enrolled for a masters but then has status upgraded after one year’s work gives evidence of a sufficient promise of substantial contribution to knowledge. Also, no doctoral programs per se- every doctorate is a matter of individual registration of a research area under supervision by a particular professor.

Intervals of Study

Semester - an institution on a semester system usually has a fall session, spring session, and summer session. A student can usually complete a bachelor’s degree by attending eight semesters.

Equivalent word is term: three per year, roughly 10-12 weeks long; normally runs September/October – December; January – March/April; April/May – early July. Note; Oxford and Cambridge terms are only eight weeks long: Cambridge has a summer school for sciences students.

Quarter – an institution on a quarter system usually has four sessions of equal duration during a year: fall, winter, spring, and summer. A student wishing to finish in four years can usually do so by attending

Term: See above

for twelve quarters.

Term - another word for semester or quarter.

Term: See above

Units of Study

Course – refers to an individual subject being studied for a term

(1) Similar to U.S. meaning although courses, if considered in this sense, usually last for a year. (2) Most common meaning essentially synonymous with U.S. meaning of program of study.

Explanation: students don't normally enrol for individual courses in U.S. sense, but for entire degree programs, within which the number and range of choice of what U.S. calls courses are predetermined by the institutions. This is a one time choice by the student on first enrolment and once made it is almost impossible to change. Students normally have to commit to an entire 3 year program of study at age 18. Thus, this system means almost no undeclared majors.

Class – can have two meanings (1) academic standing, i.e. freshman, sophomore, etc., (2) same as course

Refers to group of students in a particular program of study. An also have meaning related to (1) type of tuition given (2) level of Honours awarded in the first degree award (this last meaning is however more usually connected with level of student performance than with specific units of study).

Degree Requirements

Program of study

– refers to a listing of all courses and other requirements a student must meet in order to receive his/her degree

Courses: see above

Major

– an area of advanced academic study chosen as a field of specialisation

Similar to U.S. where program of study allows for such flexibility.

Minor

– a group of courses that offers basic preparation in a second area of study

Similar to U.S. where program of study allows for such flexibility.

Cognate

– a course or courses intended to support academic work in a student's major

Terminology not used. Concept exists, but no generally accepted term for it.

Elective

– a course freely selected by student to fulfil degree requirements

Same as in U.S.: however, more common word is option.

Class Standing

Freshman – (enrolled in first year of college work)

Sophomore – (second year)

Junior – (third year)

Senior – (fourth year)

Not normally tied in to credit hour completion: instead refers to a stage in the program of study, i.e. the year of the program of study in which the student is studying. Thus, reference are made to 'first year', 'second year', 'third year', 'final year'. The U.S terms are not used although freshman is sometimes used at Oxford and Cambridge. 'Fresher' has special meaning in Britain – it refers to a student in first 1-2 weeks of first year.

Student Status

Full-time(FT)

– enrolling for a specified # of hours, usually 12 or more if on a semester system or 18 if on a quarter system.

Enrolling in a program of study involving attendance on campus which is scheduled on all weekdays (or capable of being so scheduled), and lasting through all three terms of the year for three years. The student attends 2 sessions a day – morning and afternoon, and evening.

No U.S. term

Sandwich – a student following an otherwise full-time program of study which is extended over four years, and punctuated by three terms spent in industrial or commercial practical training, thus similar to U.S. cooperative education programs.

Part time (PT)

– a student enrolled for less than 12 semester hours or 18 quarter hours.

A student whose program of study requires weekly attendance for no more than two days a week. Student attends 3 sessions a day – morning, afternoon, and evening.

No U.S term

Block release – a student following a part-time program of study in which attendance is in short full-time blocks of 4-6 weeks of continuous study instead of being spaced evenly across a year. These students are usually on leave (with pay) from industry and commerce – hence the term ‘release’. This last form of attendance is not normally found in Universities.

Degree Seeking

– a student seeking to fulfil all requirements toward a particular degree.

Phrase not normally used.

Non-degree seeking – a student taking but not seeking a degree

Phrase not normally used. However, equivalents sometime used are ‘associate students’ and ‘extension students’.

University

– usually denotes a comprehensive educational institution which has undergraduate and graduate programs and offers bachelor’s degrees, master’s degrees, doctorate degrees, and other professional programs. A university’s various academic disciplines are usually established as colleges which in turn may be

Substantially the same, but this definition would equally apply to an English Polytechnic or a Scottish Central Institution. The key distinction is a legalistic one. A University is incorporated by Royal Charter which licenses it to confer its own degrees. A Polytechnic or a Central Institution (both terms refer to the same thing) is a statutory higher educational corporation, but does not have a Royal Charter and so cannot confer its own degrees. (The degrees conferred are those of the Council for National Academic Awards, the national accreditation body, which has a special Royal Charter specifically for this purpose. There are also, as a result, differences in funding and faculty

composed of several departments.
Example: at the University of South Carolina there is a College of Humanities and Social Sciences which has Departments of History, English, Philosophy, etc... In such an arrangement the degree a student earns is awarded by the appropriate college.

College

– several definitions apply

- (1) an academic unit of a university
- (2) a general term referring to any institution of higher education
- (3) a generic term referring to enrolment in higher education (i.e. he's in college)

Technical College – a higher education institution which primarily offers specialised two year degrees and certificates. Course work is usually technically or vocationally oriented and often times cannot be applied to a bachelor's degree.

No U.S. term

review: generally, Universities are funded directly by the Treasury, through the Universities Funding Council. The others are funded from a separate Council which comes under the Department of Education and Science. University teachers are generally tenured in the US sense: those in the Polytechnics are permanent and pensionable employees, but not 'tenured' as such. Additional note: the term Polytechnic does not imply restriction to technological subjects and courses.

- (1) The groupings of academic disciplines that are called 'College' in the U.S. are normally called 'Faculties' (note" the word 'Faculty' is not used to denote teaching staff – see COLLEGE, FACULTY, STAFF & ADMINISTRATION section). The units called 'departments' in the U.S. are either called 'Departments' or 'Schools. These may be further subdivided into 'Divisions' (eg. In Newcastle Polytechnic, the History Division is part of the school of English and History, which is located within the faculty of humanities. Where 'College' is used to refer to a part of an institution it indicates a geographical, logistic, or administrative unit (eg Pembroke College, Cambridge), not an academic one.
- (2) Used as in U.S., also., however, used as short for 'College of Higher Education' – an institution in the public education service sector which differs from a Polytechnic in that it doesn't have programs beyond the baccalaureate level.
- (3) Used as in U.S.

Same as U.S., however, should not be confused with Polytechnics

Open University – a bachelor's degree offered through

television and correspondence study. Normally takes six years to complete. Contact with an advisor is integrated into the degree.

Community College

– a higher education institution which offers associate degrees. May also offer technical degrees and certificates.

Rough equivalent term is 'College of Further Education' (there are also others). Note: the elitist conceptual distinction denotes that colleges with teaching programs leading to degrees are Higher Education – the others are not. Also note, that there is no real equivalent of the Associate Degree, since all programs with those qualifications are regarded as being of 'sub-degree' status.

Junior College

– a type of higher education institution that offers less than a baccalaureate degree – usually two year programs.

See above

Liberal arts

– a program of study in which a broad course of study is pursued including courses from humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Desired outcomes of this degree are the acquisition of general knowledge and the development of critical thinking abilities – strives to produce an educated person.

See 'courses'. Almost all British degrees are specified as being in one or two subjects. eg BA (Hons) English and History, BSc Chemical Technology, BSc and BSc (Hons) psychology. This really does mean what it says – usually 80-90% of the program of study will be in that/those subjects. Hence the U.S. 'liberal/professional' distinction is not needed.

Professional

– a program of study in which a specific, structured program of study is pursued. A primary purpose of a professional degree is master of a specific topic such as accounting, engineering, nursing, etc

See above

College Faculty, Staff and Administration

Professor – College teachers are ranked as teaching assistant, instructor, lecturer, or professor. Professor is the highest rank and includes three levels: assistant professor, associate professor, and (full) professor. While a substantial number of professors have earned a doctorate or doctoral degree, this is not a rigid rule for holding professorial rank.

President
– chief executive officer of an institution. Reports directly to a governing board (trustees or regents).

Chancellor
– title of high ranking officer in institution usually just below the president in importance.

Provost
– title given to the chief academic affairs officer.

Registrar
– administrative officer responsible for the maintenance of student academic records, registration and the interpretation and enforcement of academic rules and regulations

Bursar
– treasurer of an institution

Dean
– a college administrator who may or may not have faculty status. Common positions are: academic dean, dean of

This title is used in Britain much more sparingly than in the U.S.. It has two uses: (1) an honorary position awarded to a distinguished scholar (2) the academic or administrative leader of a school or department (usually in a University). The British teaching grades vary between institutions. In Universities they are: Lecturer, Senior Lecturer. For a College/polytechnic they are: Lecturer I (in 'further education' only), Lecturer II, Senior Lecturer, Principal Lecturer. The terms Assistant Lecturer and Demonstrator may occasionally be encountered – they are roughly equivalent to U.S. 'instructor'.

Vice-Chancellor if at a University, director if in the public sector (sometimes Principal).

Pro-Vice Chancellor, Deputy director, or vice-President. The term chancellor is used but for a purely ceremonial office (though technically the head of the institution), often held by a leading politician, aristocrat or member of the Royal Family.

Term mainly restricted to Scotland. The common British term is Chief Administrative Officer (shortened to CAO).

(1) Same as U. S. (2) can also mean same as Provost.

Use of term mainly restricted to Oxford and Cambridge. Common term is Finance Officer.

Term used for administrative head of a college or group of academic departments ('faculty' in British sense).

students, associate dean and assistant dean.

No U.S. term

External Examiner – a member of teaching staff (faculty) of one institution who acts as an independent outside assessor for the examinations and student grading system of a program in a second institution, with the purpose of ensuring equivalence of grading and degree standards across institutions throughout Britain. The British consider this a key role in maintaining the standards and coherence of their system (see 'grades' below).

The term advisor is not used. Counsellor has only the second U.S. meaning. The faculty member who does this is called a Personal Tutor (at Cambridge, the word Personal is dropped and at Oxford the term is Moral Tutor).

Academic Advisor/Counsellor

– (1) may be a faculty member in the academic field a student has chosen or a full-administrative employee of the institution who works in a counselling office. Works with a student once a major is chosen (unless an advisor of undeclared students, then helps a student choose a major). (2) Assists the student in planning a program of study, selecting classes etc.

Faculty

– professors (full, associate, assistant, etc)

(Teaching) Staff – The term faculty is used to denote an academic unit (i.e. the Faculty of Humanities).

Staff

– administrators

(Administrative) Staff.

Other Terms

Test

– an exercise, usually written.
Designed to assess a student's mastery of subject matter.

Term used as in U.S.

Exams

– same as test.

Term used as in U.S., but also to mean comprehensive exam. Usually given at the end of a year, not a term. Sometimes called 'end test'.

Comprehensive Exam

– a test/exam which covers all the material covered during the term,.

See above.

Core Courses

- specific groups of courses required by the degree granting unit (i.e college, school). Usually meant to be taken during the freshman and sophomore years and include English, Math, Science, and History. Other terms that are synonymous are: distribution requirements, basic requirements and general education requirements.

Term not normally used. Where it is, it distinguishes compulsory courses from elective ones.

Accreditation

– process where by the academic standards of a college are legitimated by a voluntary association of its peers: the formal 'seal of approval' conferred by such a process.

Term in U.K. was originally 'validation' and is still so used where every individual course (qv) is so legitimated. 'Accreditation' is used where the institution as a whole is legitimated. The main body carrying this out deals with Polytechnics and Colleges (qv) rather than Universities, and is a semi-Government organisation (The Council for National Academic Awards).

Prerequisites

– a course or courses that must be completed as a condition for taking another course.

Term used as in U.S.

Syllabus

– a course/class outline, distributed at the beginning of the course, which lists the specific requirements that must be met. Included are such items as: assignment completion dates, readings, explanation of grading system, attendance policy and a brief description of the course.

(1) Grades (2) Grading system

– usually A through F (skipping E) system with A = excellent, B = good, C = average, D = poor and F = failure. Some institutions also allow certain courses to be taken pass/fail (usually electives). The grading system is based on awarding points to the different grades and computing them. The end product is a student's grade point ratio (GPR) which is a numerical description of the letter grades. Institutions (and their respective units) have minimum GPR requirements for graduation.

Audit

– to take a course for no credit

Catalogue

– a document containing the institution's academic regulations, degree requirements, course descriptions, faculty names, and related information about the institution. Also referred to as a bulletin.

Essentially same as in U.S, however, the syllabus document may or may not be made available to students.

(1) Letter grades

(2) No exact equivalent to GPR/GPA measures. The explanation of this subject is extremely involved but it is reasonable to state that the determination of a student's degree of success in his/her studies entails evaluating the activity of the entire year's worth of work in its entirety. It involves considering both examinations and coursework assignments, and requires agreement between all the student's teachers, plus one or more outside assessors (called 'external examiners').

Term does not exist

Prospectus

Matriculate

– to be admitted and enrolled in classes.

Used as in U.S., but only in Universities. Can also mean to pass public General Certificate of Education high school exams at an appropriate level to satisfy the entry requirements of the University of London, regardless of whether the student enrolls there or not. Sometimes phrased as ‘to pass metric’.

Undeclared/undecided student

– a student who has not decided upon a major.

Neither the term nor the practice can exist in British system (see ‘course’)

Assessment

– the process of ascertaining the academic outcomes and performance of a college or other HE institution.

Usual terms in U.K. are ‘evaluation’ or ‘academic audit’. ‘Assessment’ is sometimes used – but more usually refers to the process of ascertaining student performance.

British Definition

Quality Assurance – Quality assurance encompasses all the policies, systems and processes directed to ensuring maintenance and enhancement of the quality of educational provision in higher education.

Quality Control - Quality control relates to the arrangements (procedures, standards, organisation) within HE institutions which verify that teaching and assessment are carried out in a satisfactory manner. Quality control would include the external examiner system but would usually be post hoc and the responsibility of the institution itself.

Quality Audit - Quality audit is the process of ensuring that the quality control arrangements in an institution are satisfactory. In practice, prime responsibility⁶ for quality audit lies individually or collectively with institutions. It extends to the totality of quality assurance in an institution and may include staff development and curriculum design. External quality control will be conducted by the Quality Audit Unit of the Higher Education Quality Council which is collectively owned and funded by the institutions.

Quality Assessment – quality is the process of the external evaluation of the actual provision of education. Responsibility for quality assessment is a statutory requirement of the Funding councils. The process of external assessment by peers of actual provision in particular subjects is by scrutiny of institutional documentation and student work; direct observation; interview; and by reference to performance indicators such as completion rates.