**Elective**

An elective course is one chosen by a student from a number of optional subjects or courses in a curriculum, as opposed to a required course which the student must take. While required courses (sometimes called "core courses" or "general education courses") are deemed essential for an academic degree, elective courses tend to be more specialized. Elective courses usually have fewer students than the required courses.

The term [elective](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elective_%28medical%29) is also used for a period of [medical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine) study conducted away from the student's home [medical school](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medical_school), often abroad. Motivations for choosing such a program include a wish to experience other cultures, and to learn how to work in the clinical situations in other countries.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_%28education%29#cite_note-2)

Typically, North American universities require students to achieve both breadth of knowledge across disciplines and depth of knowledge in a particular chosen subject area, known as a major. Thus, students of the Arts or Humanities are required to take some science courses, and vice versa. Normally, students are free to choose their particular electives from among a wide range of courses offered by their university, as long as the students possess the prerequisite knowledge to understand the subject matter being taught. An English major, for example, might also study one or two years of chemistry, biology or physics as well as mathematics and a foreign language.

Elective courses are also offered in the third and fourth years of university, though the choice is more restrictive and will depend upon the particular major the student has chosen. For example, at the [University of British Columbia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_British_Columbia), students intending to specialize in [Sanskrit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskrit) as part of a major in Asian language and culture will usually have to complete several Sanskrit and [Hindustani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindustani_language) or [Punjabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjabi_language) courses during the first two years of university, as well as additional courses in other languages of India in the third and fourth years of study. In addition to these required courses, however, students would choose among several third- and fourth-year elective courses on topics not directly related to India, such as the history and culture of [China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), [Japan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) or [Indonesia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesia)

In [higher education in Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education_in_Canada) and the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Higher_education_in_the_United_States), a **course** is a unit of teaching that typically lasts one [academic term](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_term), is led by one or more instructors ([teachers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher) or [professors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Professor)), and has a fixed roster of [students](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student). A course is usually an individual subject. Students may receive a [grade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grade_%28education%29) and academic [credit](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit_%28education%29) after completion of the course.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_%28education%29#cite_note-dict-1)

In the [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom), [Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia) and [Singapore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singapore), as well as parts of [Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada), a **course** is the entire programme of studies required to complete a [university](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University) degree, and the word "unit" or "module" would be used to refer to an academic course as it is referred to in other parts of the world, for example [North America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America) and the rest of [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe).

In between the two, in South Africa, a course officially is the collection of all courses (in the American sense, these are often called "modules") over a year or semester, though the American usage is common. In the Philippines, a course can be an individual subject (usually referred to by faculty and school officials) or the entire programme (usually referred to by students and outsiders).

Courses in American universities are usually on a time constraint. Some courses are only a few weeks long, one semester long, last an academic year (two semesters), and even three semesters long. A course is usually specific to the students' major and is instructed by a professor. For example, if a person is taking an organic chemistry course, then the professor would teach the students organic chemistry and how it applies to their life and or major. Courses can also be referred to as "electives". An elective is usually not a required course, but there are a certain number of non-specific electives that are required for certain majors.