

Introduction

I was a college student for eight years. The first thing you might assume is that it took me that long to graduate with a Bachelor degree. A lot of people think that, so I usually just put it out there. Unfortunately, that can sound like I'm bragging, when I'm just trying to state a fact to avoid a misinterpretation. In those eight years, I earned two minors, two majors, and a Mastery. Now it sounds like I put my time to good use, but I actually could have had all that in seven years. For this guide, I'm going to assume that you've already chosen one or more majors and zero or more minors.

Yes, I know that there is a duplicate course in the list. I plan to redo this guide in the near future.

One technique I used before I even started at a four year university was to list every class that I had taken during high school (and what it transferred in as), all classes required by my major, all competency courses (two English, one math, and one speaking), any electives needed for my major, any general education courses required, any degree electives required, and then any fill-in-the-blanks to get to the number of credits required to graduate. I'm going to run through a very generic process from beginning to end for someone with a major, minor, and several classes transferring in. I'm also going to use Central Michigan University's program, as it's the one I'm most familiar with. I'll use their current version, so you can follow along with me, if you like.

Here's the [link](#). I'll be using a mixture of the interactive version along the PDF version, both for the 2013-14 school year.

Here we have Mark, an above average student going to Central. He took AP English in high school, as well as several courses at a local community college, all of which he passed. He thinks he knows that degree he wants to earn: a major in history and a minor in sociology. He had never really thought about it back during high school, but his interest in reading and writing historical fiction, especially how groups of people worked together to get through difficult times, was a neon arrow that he utterly missed. Thankfully, he took a general history course with an excellent teacher

Step 1: Classes Already Taken

Let's start by looking at what Mark has taken so far:

- AP English (passed test with a 4)
- English Composition II
- Mythology
- Creative Writing
- The American Civil War
- Principles of Marketing
- Intro to Sociology
- American Sign Language I
- Intermediate Algebra

The first question to ask is which of these transfers in, and what does it transfer in as? Central has a tool to see how any class is transferred.

AP English -> ENG 101 Freshman Composition
English Composition II -> ENG 201 Intermediate Composition
Mythology -> English Credit (3)
Creative Writing -> ENG 294 Introduction to Creative Writing
The American Civil War -> History Credit (3)
Principles of Marketing -> Got a C-, need at least a C to transfer
Intro to Sociology -> SOC 100 Introductory Sociology
American Sign Language I -> ASL Credit (4)
Intermediate Algebra -> MTH 105 Intermediate Algebra

As you can see, not everything transfers in as a class, or at all. Mark got lucky in that he didn't take anything that didn't have an equivalent at Central. He didn't get lucky in that some of his courses won't count toward specific requirements, outside of the overall credit count and major electives.

At the end of step 1, here is Mark's current class list:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)
ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)
ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Total Credits: 25

All in all, not too bad. Mark is just one credit shy of starting as a sophomore.

Step 2: The Major(s)

Now we need to add the required classes for Mark's major. For the history major, there are requirements that make a student take a broad view of history, while still giving them choices. Starting out, there are two required courses that all must take:

HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)
HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)

Next, Marks gets to choose one course from a list related to US history. Due to his interest in contentious times (they make for better historical fiction), he chooses:

HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)

Next is to choose from a list of courses pertaining to European history. Mark likes the look of a few of them, but chooses:

HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)

The next list is about non-western history, though some of them are general world history, and therefore touch on the western world (a lot). Mark decides on:

HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)

The final list is about pre-modern history, and Mark decides on:

HST 505 - Tudor England (3)

The last of the requirements before moving on to major electives has Mark selecting two more courses numbered from 100-599, which is nearly any history course. Looking back over the previous lists, Mark likes the sound of:

HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)

HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)

The first of the electives selections requires two courses numbered 300-500. Mark continues to look around for classes that can give him interesting backdrops for his fiction writing. He decides on:

HST 369 - Traditional China (3)

HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)

The final courses he needs to choose from has to be numbered at 500 or above, but not counting 590. There are fewer choices here, and they are bound to be more difficult, since they count as graduate level courses as well.

HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)

Now Mark is done choosing classes for his major. He chose his courses based on what he would like to do: write and sell historical fiction, probably on the side. He chose classes that focus on contentious periods, including various wars, civil rights movements, and events placing the rulers against the ruled.

At the end of step 2, here is Mark's master class list:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)

ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)

ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)

SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)

MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3)

HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)

HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)

HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)

HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)

HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)

HST 505 - Tudor England (3)

HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)

HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)

HST 369 - Traditional China (3)

HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)

HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)

English Credit (3)

History Credit (3)

ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Total Credits: 58

Step 3: The Minor(s)

As Mark decided on a sociology minor, he needs to go through this step. As it's a minor, it's a bit easier to work this out. For this specific minor, he starts with four required courses:

SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)

SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)

SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)

SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)

Next is one elective chosen from a list. There are a couple Mark is thinking about, but decides on:

SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)

Finally, he has to choose any eight credits worth of courses. Looking through the course descriptions, he chooses:

SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)

SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)

SOC 215 - Youth, Deviance, and Institutions (3)

There isn't a way to get exactly five credits, and so has to choose six.

At the end of step 3, here is the master class list:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)

ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)

ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)

SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)

MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3) HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)

HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)

HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)

HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)

HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)

HST 505 - Tudor England (3)

HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)

HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)

HST 369 - Traditional China (3)

HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)

HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)
SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)
SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)
SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)
SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)
SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)
SOC 215 - Youth, Deviance, and Institutions (3)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Minor Credits: 24/23

Total Credits: 79

Step 4: General Education Requirements

This step can be done before or after step 5. Either way, a later step will go back through the list and change things.

Central has a 30 credit Gen Ed requirement, where you have to choose from a list in each of nine categories, as well as a tenth course (or at least have 30 credits total) from any of the lists. You can only take two from the same department once, meaning that if you count two history courses (both starting with HST), then you can't also count two sociology courses toward the Gen Ed requirement. Most universities have something similar.

The first group contains two lists pertaining to the humanities. The first list is for human events and ideas while the second list is from the arts. For this group, Mark will take:

HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)
ENG 134 - Introduction to Literature (3)

As you can see, he already has HST 238 selected, so this will double count. The second has two lists from the natural science. The first list is for descriptive science and the second is for quantitative science. One of these courses must include a lab. Mark chooses:

ANT 171 - Human Origins: Introduction to Physical Anthropology (3)
PHY 110 - Physics of Sports (3)

To get the lab credit, Mark is adding:

ANT 173 - Laboratory in Physical Anthropology (1)

The third group is focused on the social sciences, and broken up into two lists. The first list behavioral science courses and the second has courses dealing with social structures. Here, Mark is choosing:

PSY 334 - Psychology of Women (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)

Again, Mark is double counting a course to reduce the time and money invested in his education. The final group has three lists, all pertaining to integrative and area studies: integrative and multidisciplinary studies, global cultures, and US cultural diversity. Here is where Mark has to make a difficult choice, which affects what he will do in the next step: In the second list of this group, he can take a general course or take one where he will learn a language. Mark is going to wait before choosing from that second list. From the other two lists, Mark decides on:

REL 235 - Religion and Social Issues (3)
JRN 380 - Racial Diversity: Mass Media's Role (3)

He could double count a course from the first and third lists, but he is already counting two courses from the history department. And he still needs two more credits to finish up his Gen Ed requirements, but he will come back to that after the next step.

Here is what Mark plans to take so far:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)
ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)
ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3) HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)
HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)
HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)
HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)
HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)
HST 505 - Tudor England (3)
HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)
HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)
HST 369 - Traditional China (3)
HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)
HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)
SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)
SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)
SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)
SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)
SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)
ENG 134 - Introduction to Literature (3)
ANT 171 - Human Origins: Introduction to Physical Anthropology (3)
PHY 110 - Physics of Sports (3)
ANT 173 - Laboratory in Physical Anthropology (1)
PSY 334 - Psychology of Women (3)

REL 235 - Religion and Social Issues (3)
JRN 380 - Racial Diversity: Mass Media's Role (3)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Minor Credits: 24/23

Total Credits: 88

This a long, and nearly overwhelming, list of courses. And we aren't even done.

Step 5: Degree Requirements

The history major allows Mark to choose between either the Bachelor of Arts or the Bachelor of Science. Both have different requirements. The BA requires that the student take up to the fourth class of a foreign language, 15 credits from the humanities, 15 credits from the natural science, and 15 credits from the social sciences. The BS is broken up into Plan A and Plan B, no language requirements, and fewer extra classes. Plan A is for any major with an optional minor and requires an extra six credits. Plan B has a few options, but it amounts to either a major and/or minor from an approved list. Thankfully, both Mark's history major and sociology minor are on the list. As Mark doesn't want to spend five or more years and a lot more money, he decides work toward the BS Plan B Option 1 (approved major, any minor).

Mark first needs to select six credits from the humanities. As any class from the English department counts, he already has this. Next, he needs six credits from the natural sciences. His math and physics courses count toward this. Finally, he needs to select six credits from the social sciences. Here, his sociology courses count, meaning that he is already meeting all degree requirements from his existing course list.

However, Mark still needs to go back and select a course from the second list of the fourth group for a Gen Ed requirement, as well as two or more credits to bring is all up to 30 total Gen Ed credits. Mark decides to go with:

PSC 341 - Comparative Politics: Eastern Europe (3)
ECO 222 - Behavioral Economics (3)

This rounds out his Gen Ed requirements, and gives him the following class list:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)
ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)
ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3)HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)
HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)
HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)
HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)
HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)

HST 505 - Tudor England (3)
HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)
HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)
HST 369 - Traditional China (3)
HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)
HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)
SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)
SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)
SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)
SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)
SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)
ENG 134 - Introduction to Literature (3)
ANT 171 - Human Origins: Introduction to Physical Anthropology (3)
PHY 110 - Physics of Sports (3)
ANT 173 - Laboratory in Physical Anthropology (1)
PSY 334 - Psychology of Women (3)
REL 235 - Religion and Social Issues (3)
JRN 380 - Racial Diversity: Mass Media's Role (3)
PSC 341 - Comparative Politics: Eastern Europe (3)
ECO 222 - Behavioral Economics (3)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Minor Credits: 24/23

Total Credits: 104/124

Step 6: Competency Requirements

This is your English, math, and speech requirement list. Mark already has the two English requirements, and maybe the math as well. The speech requirement contains a course that is also listed as a Gen Ed course. Mark decides to drop the ENG 134 course and instead selects:

TAI 170 - Oral Interpretation of Literature (3)

The math competency requires that Mark take any math course numbered 105 or higher. He got lucky here, as he had nearly decided to take a lower level math course back at the community college. His MTH 105 transfer will count, instead.

Here is Mark's current list:

ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)

ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)
ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3)HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)
HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)
HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)
HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)
HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)
HST 505 - Tudor England (3)
HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)
HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)
HST 369 - Traditional China (3)
HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)
HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)
SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)
SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)
SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)
SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)
SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)
SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)
TAI 170 - Oral Interpretation of Literature (3)
ANT 171 - Human Origins: Introduction to Physical Anthropology (3)
PHY 110 - Physics of Sports (3)
ANT 173 - Laboratory in Physical Anthropology (1)
PSY 334 - Psychology of Women (3)
REL 235 - Religion and Social Issues (3)
JRN 380 - Racial Diversity: Mass Media's Role (3)
PSC 341 - Comparative Politics: Eastern Europe (3)
ECO 222 - Behavioral Economics (3)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Minor Credits: 24/23

Total Credits: 104/124

Step 7: General Electives

Mark has every required course selected, and his list totals to 104 credits. A BS degree requires that he earn 124. He has 20 more credits to select. There are multiple ways he could do this. He could select one or more minors, he could change his minor into a second major, he could take a series of language courses, or he

could select any course he wishes to add to his list.

Looking over the sociology major, Mark sees that he would only need to add a few courses, and maybe change one or two, and the minor would easily change into a major. There doesn't seem to be an English minor that focuses on writing, and the major adds too many classes that have nothing to do with what he wants to spend his life doing. He didn't enjoy ASL enough to continue on with it, nor does he want to have to take the Central equivalent of a course that he has already taken. Taking language courses could be interesting, but would force him to contort his schedule to make everything fit. It seems best to add courses as he sees fit, partially to try some new things, as well as giving him a lot more flexibility in his future scheduling.

He spends an hour or two looking over the complete course listing, and selects the following:

- ECO 101 Economics as a Way of Thinking (3)
- EGR 120 Introduction to Engineering (3)
- ENG 325 Folklore (3)
- ENG 391 Creative Writing: Fiction (3)
- ENG 491 Advanced Fiction Writing (3)
- PHL 105 Critical Reasoning in Everyday Life (3)
- PED 127 Beginning Swimming (1)
- PED 129 Intermediate Swimming (1)
- PED 130 Advanced Swimming (1)

His selection gives him an overview of a wide variety of things and thought processes that can help his writing. He also has a minor interest in swimming, and views it as a way to stay in shape, since he'll be spending a lot of his time in the library doing research. Since he's one credit over the requirement, he can always drop PED 130. He can also switch any of his general electives for something else with the same number of credits.

Here is his entire course listing:

- ENG 101 - Freshman Composition (3)
- ENG 201 - Intermediate Composition (3)
- ENG 294 - Introduction to Creative Writing (3)
- SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
- MTH 105 - Intermediate Algebra (3)
- HST 300 - The Craft of History (3)
- HST 496 - Research Seminar (3)
- HST 315 - The Vietnam War (3)
- HST 352 - British Imperialism (3)
- HST 379 - Race, Class and Power: South Africa in the 20th Century (3)
- HST 505 - Tudor England (3)
- HST 238 - Ancient Greece and Rome (3)
- HST 353 - Germany since 1870 (3)
- HST 369 - Traditional China (3)
- HST 325 - African American History, 1877-Present (3)
- HST 524 - American Diplomatic History Since 1898 (3)
- SOC 100 - Introductory Sociology (3)
- SOC 200 - Introduction to Social Research and Analysis (3)
- SOC 301 - Sociological Theory (3)

SOC 350 - Social Research Methodologies (3)
SOC 304 - Collective Behavior (3)
SOC 302 - Social Inequality (3)
SOC 321 - Deviant Behavior (3)
TAI 170 - Oral Interpretation of Literature (3)
ANT 171 - Human Origins: Introduction to Physical Anthropology (3)
PHY 110 - Physics of Sports (3)
ANT 173 - Laboratory in Physical Anthropology (1)
PSY 334 - Psychology of Women (3)
REL 235 - Religion and Social Issues (3)
JRN 380 - Racial Diversity: Mass Media's Role (3)
PSC 341 - Comparative Politics: Eastern Europe (3)
ECO 222 - Behavioral Economics (3)
ECO 101 Economics as a Way of Thinking (3)
EGR 120 Introduction to Engineering (3)
ENG 325 Folklore (3)
ENG 391 Creative Writing: Fiction (3)
ENG 491 Advanced Fiction Writing (3)
PHL 105 Critical Reasoning in Everyday Life (3)
PED 127 Beginning Swimming (1)
PED 129 Intermediate Swimming (1)
PED 130 Advanced Swimming (1)
English Credit (3)
History Credit (3)
ASL Credit (4)

Major Credits: 33/33

Minor Credits: 24/23

Total Credits: 104/124

As he has 25 credits complete, he will start as a freshman. It will take him, at the recommended 15 credits a semester, just over three years to complete his degree, so long as he uses the scheduling techniques that will be mentioned in just a bit. One thing he can do to make his life even easier is to take one or two courses each summer through his old community college. It really depends on what is offered and what transfers.

Step 8: Creating a Semester Schedule

Here is where it all comes together. All Mark has at the moment is a very long list which makes him wonder how anyone can make it through college in less than a decade. The entire point of having this list, besides making sure you're on track to graduate, is to help you get a good schedule each and every semester. We don't want you to be overcrowded with five high level history courses, have it too easy with five low level electives, or find that the one courses you must have no matter what isn't being offered your last semester.

Okay, it's spring and Mark has the available class list for the following fall. He's all ready to start figuring out

his courses, but where does he start? Here is what he needs to focus on by priority:

1. Major
2. Minor
3. Competencies
4. General Education/Degree Requirements
5. General Electives

You can't graduate without a major. You can't get the degree you want without the minor. These two things need to take priority. As you have more major classes than minor classes, focus on your major first. Mark is a nearly into his second year and has none of his major complete. He wants to graduate in three years.

First and foremost, he needs to take two classes from his major. He has 11 classes to take and six semesters to take them in. If a class is a prerequisite for another, take the prereq. You want maximum flexibility each and every semester, which gets harder as time goes on. Once he has picked out two major classes, or at least has a few he can choose from, he should select two minor classes. He has seven classes left for his minor, which means that he needs to get one or two every semester. Better to have two lower courses at once than two higher level ones.

As for what he schedules when, it's largely up to Mark. He could schedule everything from 8-11 five days a week, if he's a morning person. Or he could go with 1-4, and be able to sleep in every day. Or have everything two or three days a week. So long as he gets the classes he needs, then fills in with electives, he'll be fine.

Notes

When I started at Central a while ago, I had 30 credits transferring in, most of which were just credit. I went into computer science and no minor. I did the above one night in even more detail; I kept track of which requirement every course counted as, what was a prereq to what, what I planned to take the following semester (if it was offered), and such. Despite having long chains of prereqs with my classes, I still finished in three years.

This technique is also useful for planning out your graduate studies, as I later found out. It can also be used for going to multiple schools at once, such as a four year university and a community college at the same time. You can also adapt it to any other university system, though I would recommend taking your list to an academic adviser to make sure all requirements are being met.

Some may be wondering if Mark is an idiot for majoring in history and minoring in sociology, just because he wants to write historical fiction. Or if I'm an idiot for writing him that way. No, actually. Can he do more than just keep going and becoming a professor? Yes. Believe it or not, the CIA would be happy to hire him to be an analyst. They want people who understand the historical background of fighting and the consequences of taking various actions. International and non-profit organizations would also be happy to hire him. Or, he could still go the route I expect him to and become a professor, always researching human history, and padding his bank account by writing very accurate historical fiction in those eras.

For now, we'll leave it at that.