
Planning for academic success: The 4 year plan

Making plans for the holidays and winter break with your family member? How about looking a bit further out and planning for graduation while you are at it. USF is currently in the middle of registration for spring classes and students should have met with their advisor to determine their spring registration. Things can get a bit hectic during these periods, but the student who already has their 4 year plan and is working toward that plan is in a much better position. So perhaps it is time to look at the 4 year plan. Let's look at some tools and tips for creating the 4 year plan and tracking student progression.

Each major at USF has a framework for the 4 year plan that is easily accessible via Undergraduate Studies website at <http://ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/current/>. The ATLAS website was designed so students have access to a template for creating their 4 year plan. The plans also include critical tracking points or courses that must be successfully completed to ensure progression to graduation in 4 years. These plans are not meant as a prescription, but more as a guideline. It is recommended that students work in collaboration with their advisor on their individual plan.

If we take an example from one of the more popular majors, Biomedical Sciences (BMS), which has a common first year with some of the other sciences (i.e., Biology, Chemistry), you can begin to see how important successful completion of the recommended courses can be for on-time graduation. Click this link to follow along <http://ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/current/semesterPlans.php?progCode=BMSBMS> or go to the link above and navigate for yourself.

For instance, one of the first critical tracking points is identified in semester two as CHM 2046 General Chemistry II. It is a pre-requisite for required courses in future semesters. So you may be thinking, well that's easy a student just has to take CHM 2046 in the first year and they are set for the next year.

However, there is more to it 😊 The CHM 2046 course also has a pre-requisite of CHM 2045 General Chemistry and CHM 2045L General Chemistry Lab, which need to be taken (and successfully completed with a C grade) in the first semester. Seems simple enough, unless a student has not met the pre-requisites for taking CHM 2045, which are 550 SAT Quantitative score or completion of MAC 1105 College Algebra with a C or better AND one year of high school chemistry or completion of CHM 2023 with a grade of C or better. Then things get a bit more complicated.

So now the student has to adjust from following the prescribed courses to fitting in the pre-requisites in the first two semesters and utilizing the summer to complete the critical tracking course of CHM2046. A similar situation can occur if a student is not prepared to take any of the calculus courses recommended in the second semester as they both have pre-requisites and are pre-requisites for critically tracked requirements in the second year.

Not having pre-requisites or not successfully completing pre-requisites and having to re-take courses is one of the major causes of not just being off track for the 4 year plan, but it also has potential for creating Excess Hour Surcharges in the future. This is why the combination of a good plan and monitoring progress towards the plan is vital.

This is important for all students whether they are beginning their academic career at USF or transfer in from another institution to complete their degree at USF. Successful completion of each semester and critical tracking point is significant in determining their overall success

There are other advising resources for those students who enter USF with a plan that due to insufficient pre-requisites or challenges with successful completion of pre-requisite, they are unable to continue with their original plan.

The Transitional Advising Center (TRAC) has dedicated advisors for Reselection. They can review the student's goals and interests and offer some options for alternative majors. Then, with the assistance of the new major advisor, the student can create a plan to get themselves on track for completion with limited impact on the 4 year goal or Excess Hours.

The sooner a student comes to terms with their ability to successfully complete required and critical tracking courses, the sooner they can take action to either gain assistance with preparing for the pre-requisites via Tutoring Services or get assistance with Reselection, thus avoiding the pitfalls and costs of not having or monitoring the 4 year plan.

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