
Planning for academic success: How 2 new USF Academic Policies are encouraging students toward success

To encourage student success USF now has 2 new academic policies: 1) Mid-Term Grades Posting and 2) Degree Progression and Completion Deadlines for Undergraduate Students. These policies establish a clear expression of our dedication to 1) keep students informed of their progress and 2) keep them focused on their ultimate goal of graduation.

Mid-Term Grades Posting

This policy was referred to in last month's newsletter regarding USF's policy for withdrawing from classes <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/1213/pdf/DropsWithdrawals.pdf>. The policy states:

It is the student's sole responsibility to be aware of their academic standing and grade status in all courses. In an attempt to assist the student in evaluating his academic status mid-term, the University requires Instructors to submit midterm grades electronically for each student enrolled in 1000, 2000 and 3000 level courses (*1000 and 2000 level courses only at USFSM). This is a courtesy to the student and failure of an instructor to post the mid-term grades will not be grounds for a student academic grievance nor will it be justification for a retroactive drop as the student is presumed to be aware of current academic status.*

Implications for the policy are that students have greater opportunity to monitor their progress not just in the first year, but for any courses they take at 1000, 2000, or 300 level. Please refer to the August newsletter for reminders regarding implications for withdrawing based on midterm grades. This is an opportunity to engage with instructors and advisors about academic progress and the resources USF has to support academic success. Midterm grades should not be seen as an endpoint or predictive of final grades.

Part of the rationale for providing a greater breadth of midterm grades is to keep students focused on their progression towards graduation. This relates to the other new USF academic policy: Degree Progression and Completion Deadlines for Undergraduate Students.

Degree Progression and Completion Deadlines for Undergraduate Students

This policy supports USF's focus on Student Success by specifying the length of time students should spend in pursuit of an undergraduate degree. The policy states:

Students are expected to graduate within the minimum number of semesters appropriate to their academic work completed at the time of their admission and the extent to which they are able to be enrolled full-time. Summer sessions are not counted as semesters for the provision of this Policy.

Typically, for students entering as first time in college, this means they have 8 full-time semesters to complete their degree. If a student enters USF as the first time in college having completed an AA in conjunction with their HS diploma they are expected to complete in 4 full-time semesters. This is dependent on the academic plan they develop with their advisor for approval by their college.

For the transfer students who enter with 60 hours or an AA degree completed, they are expected to complete in 4 full-time semesters, based on them having completed all pre-requisites and critical tracking criteria for their major program at admission. An additional semester may be required for students in programs that require more than 120 hours or have a lockstep sequence for courses. These students will need to work with their advisors and colleges to establish their academic plan and if any additional semesters will be required.

Families can help students by asking about their academic plan and sharing in the conversation about the importance of planning. Preparation is the key to meeting the requirements of this policy. From choosing a major and understanding the pre-requisites and criteria for admission to meeting critical tracking points along the degree and understanding the career expectations there are important decisions to be made.

Decisions regarding major changes, taking on a second major or minor now require a more formal assessment of the student's ability to complete according to the policy. The best first step a student can make when considering a change of major is speaking with the advisor for the program they wish to enter to review the following considerations: 1) How many credit hours have they already attempted and how many will they need to complete the new major (or minor) and degree; 2) What are the restrictions to beginning and completing the new major (or minor); and 3) What are the implications of the new major (or minor) for career goals.

Credit hours attempted and credit hours needed

Students should monitor their progress and have a clear picture of the hours they have attempted and earned throughout their college career as these are part of their permanent academic record. Remember that courses a student withdrew from still count as attempted hours. The implications for Financial Aid and Excess Hour Surcharge must be considered in addition to the expectations of the academic policy.

The college has the final say as to whether a student is allowed to declare the major (or minor) and they will look for indicators of potential success and ability to complete without incurring excess or needing more than an additional 2 semesters to meet the 8 semester expectation for graduation.

Restrictions to starting or completing a new program

Some majors at USF have lockstep course sequences which have implications for completion within the expectations of the policy. For instance, if a program requires a student to join a cohort in fall, the student should not be planning a change of major for spring. Others require completion of certain pre-requisites or attainment of a specific GPA to begin the program. For instance, if a major requires a

student to take pre-requisites that take 2 semesters to complete, they need to be at a stage to complete those without increasing their total semesters at USF to more than 10.

This means students in their sophomore year who have earned 45 hours need to review their plan and make appropriate adjustments for changing a major, taking on a second major or taking on a minor. After their junior year or completion of 96 hours the opportunity to change or add to their plan of study will be restricted.

Implications for career goals

We sometimes find students making decisions about changing their major or trying to complete a second major or minor without really considering the career implications. We want to encourage thoughtful decision making where the student has researched career options and analyzed the costs and rewards of making a change or taking on another program. More is not necessarily better and sometimes a change in a career goal does not require a change in major. Utilizing 'Major Possibilities' offered via Career Services <http://www.usf.edu/career-services/> can enhance this part of the decision making.

Our hope is that you can begin the conversation about how these decisions have implications. Please encourage your family member at USF to meet with academic advisors to ensure all the appropriate considerations have been made when changing their academic plan, or for keeping to their academic plan for 4 year graduation!

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