

Getting a college degree takes more than four years

Excessive requirements and miscommunication keep students in school

Students at UNC Asheville who wish to graduate in four years will have a hard time if they fail to remain mindful of the university's specific course requirements, including integrative liberal studies courses that sometimes feel more burdensome than beneficial.

According to the UNCA institutional research, slightly more than 30 percent of students who entered UNCA as full-time freshmen in fall 2005 graduated last May, while 51.4 percent of students graduated last May after five years at the university.

The trend continues back to graduation in May 2003, with lower percentages of students graduating in four years compared to five and six.

Patricia McClellan, UNCA's assistant provost for academic administration, said students fail to graduate in four years for a number of reasons, including having two majors, changing their majors, simply not wishing to graduate in four years or being unaware of UNCA's requirements.

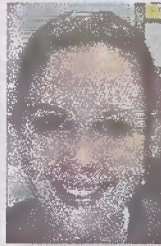
Two ILS requirements students occasionally struggle to meet, or denounce as unnecessary, are topical clusters, which consist of a natural science, a social science and an elective in various categories, and intensives, like writing, diversity, quantitative and information literacy courses.

"The only thing that frustrates me about the requirements is the clusters," said Charlotte Law, an environmental studies student at UNCA planning to graduate in five years.

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It can be excessive, especially since many of the course combinations in each cluster seem random and unrelated.

Students usually aim for clusters containing courses they must complete for



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their majors and minors, and select the most appealing or most painless classes.

Though the concept of clusters is applicable in a liberal arts setting, many students do not want to bother taking the additional courses.

Cluster courses should be unified under topics that are more related to students' majors and interests so they feel less pointless and annoying.

Intensive courses also prove troublesome, especially since the aspects of each intensive course should already exist in UNCA's classes.

"I do feel that the intensives are ridiculous requirements," said UNCA student Tayler Harris, graduating in May after four years of college. "As part of our liberal arts education, each professor should be challenging us with assignments that assess our writing, diversity and quantitative competency."

Law and Harris both said they know many students at UNCA who will not be graduating in four years.

However, graduating in four years is certainly possible. Harris graduates in May, after eight semesters, with a political science major and a history minor.

She also spent a semester at Belmont Abbey College before transferring to UNCA and another semester in Washington, D.C., for an internship.

"I feel that UNCA students can graduate in four years if their circumstances are just right," Harris said. "For example, I took 17 to 18 hours a semester until my senior year, and I didn't feel overwhelmed or like I couldn't handle my course load."

Harris added that most students do

Graduation rate statistics for 2007

- * Fifty-six percent of U.S. students who entered in 2001 graduated by 2007.
- * The North Carolina graduation rate for the same timeline is 58.5 percent.
- * Nearly 40 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in college in the U.S. This constituted 10,008,871 students across the country.
- * Roughly 33 percent of North Carolina students, in the same age group, were enrolled in college.
- * The retention rate for full-time students returning for their second years was 77.1 percent across the country.
- * In North Carolina, the retention rate for full-time students was slightly more than 77.6 percent.
- * Across the nation, the percentage of high school graduates enrolling immediately in college was 61.6 percent.
- * In North Carolina, for that same group, the number was 65.6 percent.

Information courtesy of The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

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not feel like they have full control over their grades with more than 15 hours a semester, which makes it more difficult to finish in four years.

"Also, you have to basically have your major narrowed down and a cluster chosen by the end of your freshman year to successfully fulfill your graduation requirements in four years," Harris said.

She said each freshman or transfer student who comes to UNCA has the opportunity to discover UNCA's graduation requirements, but LSIC professors,

who are supposed to inform freshmen of their duties, often fail to do so.

"Plan ahead," Harris advised. "Try to make an eight-semester plan as early as possible. Find a knowledgeable professor on campus who is willing to help you."

Even though graduating in four years can be challenging, students can manage it if they care enough to take the time to inform themselves and plan out their se-