

Why is one UM-Flint biology program a Bachelor of Arts program?

Hello Biology Majors,

In 2016, a student asked the following questions through the “Hear My Voice” link on the UM-Flint website. I believe that all biology students might benefit from my answers.

The questions:

“Why does a human biology [major] receive a bachelor's in arts when biology of any kind deals with science? Also, why are human biology majors the only major out of all the biology majors to be considered a BA instead of a BS? When I asked about this before, the only answer I received was that students who receive a BA have to get additional credits to fit the BA requirements; however, my question still remains unanswered: why does a major concerning science get deemed a BA?”

My answers:

Below is an excerpt from this website:

<https://www.universitylanguage.com/guides/ba-bs-degree/>. This excerpt gives a pretty good explanation about the differences between BA & BS degrees.

“The critical differences between a BA degree and a BS degree are the ancillary courses that are taken.

The BA degree is often mistakenly thought to be exclusively for a humanities major such as history, literature or philosophy, but a BA can also indicate a science major such as psychology, biology or physics.

The defining characteristic of a BA degree is that it requires a core curriculum in the humanities and social sciences. A student pursuing a BA will have more freedom to explore disciplines outside his/her major field.

The BS degree, without exception, indicates either a science major or a vocational major such as nursing, engineering or business management.

A BS degree usually includes more requirements in your major field than a BA degree does. This means that a student taking a BS degree will have fewer opportunities to explore courses outside of his/her major.”

To answer the question specifically for the Human Biology Program, a little history about the program is helpful. The Human Biology Program was originally created in 2002 to serve pre-physical therapy and pre-physician assistant students. The admission requirements for those professional programs require much less science coursework than our Bachelor of Science programs in biology; consequently, the Human Biology Program had significantly fewer required science courses than our

Bachelor of Science Programs. Human Biology students then had the ability to select a greater breadth of non-science or pursue one or more non-science minors, if they wished.

Over time, an increasing number of pre-medical and pre-dental students showed interest in selecting the Human Biology Program with the understanding that they could substitute the pre-medical/pre-dental chemistry courses for the much lesser chemistry requirements of the Human Biology Program. In response to this student interest, pre-medical and pre-dental concentrations were added to the Human Biology Program in 2013 when similar pre-professional concentrations were added to our Bachelor of Science programs. Our intent was to give pre-medical and pre-dental students the option to choose the Human Biology Program not to convert the program into a Bachelor of Science program.

I acknowledge that the Human Biology Program requires a lot of science courses, especially the pre-medical and pre-dental concentrations. However, I hope that the explanation above helps students understand the historical and philosophical rationale for the Bachelor of Arts designation of the Human Biology Program.

--Dr. Myers

Professor and Chair of Biology (2009 – 2019)