

Common Characteristics of Upper Division Courses

Upper-division courses generally have one or more of the following characteristics:

- **In-depth study and focus on theory and methods**: students pursue in-depth study of a discipline's theories and methods, and develop an understanding of the applications and limitations of those theories. Greater emphasis on theory and applying theory to practice.
- **Specialization**: students develop specific intellectual and professional abilities that will enable them to succeed or progress in a particular field or professional practice. Prepares students for Master's degree work.
- **Refinement**: students build upon lower division coursework, applying that knowledge and skill set more discerningly or in more challenging contexts.
- **Preparation**: prerequisites may include general or foundational courses, student class standing, GPA requirements, or admission to a pre-professional program. Thus, majors and minors generally take upper-division courses in their junior and senior years.
- **Bridging function to move students from lower division competency to upper division mastery**
- **An integrative function**: students integrate knowledge and experience gained from earlier studies.
- **Currency**: More currency in the field of study than foundational lower division courses.
- **Practicums, workforce training, and/or apprenticeships**
- **Assignments**:
 - Should require lower division knowledge and apply that knowledge as demonstrated measures of critical thinking through writing, oral communication, and/or computation.
 - Emphasize synthesis, integration, and critical thinking.

- Rigorous research and writing assignments that require critical thinking.
- A student self-evaluation component (e.g. portfolios and capstone projects).
- Other types of independent learning projects.
- Case studies featured.
- **The Course Outline of Record:**
 - Higher level SLOs (reflecting greater complexity, depth, breadth, and specialization).
 - More depth in course lecture content.

Adapted from the University of Nevada, Reno; ASCCC Baccalaureate Degree Task Force (*Rostrum*, Sept. 2015); and discussions held at the ASCCC Baccalaureate Degree Meeting (San Diego, May 2015).