This is a draft document. An updated document will be presented at the UGSC meeting.

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Illinois Tech Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degree Proposal

Reduced Credit Bachelor's Degree Proposal

The following document outlines a proposal to offer reduced credit bachelor's degrees. Such degrees would require a minimum of 90 credits and be designed to be completed in 3 years, rather than the traditional 4. The first of these degrees in the U.S. were launched in 2023 [source]. Degrees of this nature have recently been approved by HLC [see HLC policy] and other accrediting bodies, and offer an exciting opportunity to reach more students through relevant education.

Summary Proposal

Reduced credit bachelor's degrees are degrees intended to be completed in 3 years, rather than the traditional 4. They must: consist of a minimum of 90 credit hours; meet all standard university core curriculum requirements; meet all accreditation requirements; undergo regular and rigorous assessment. The requirement that the final 45 credits of a degree be completed at Illinois Tech applies to accelerated programs. Additionally, they must clearly be designated as reduced credit degrees and named such to distinguish them from the 4-year B.S. in all communications.

Reduced-credit bachelor's degrees must not be offered in areas where such reduction would undermine students' ability to meet licensure or other professional requirements.

Mission Alignment and Alignment to HLC Criteria

Reduced credit Bachelor's degrees have a clear alignment to the university's longstanding mission and current strategic priorities. Additionally, we are well situated to launch such degrees in a way that meets HLC accreditation criteria.

Criterion 1 Mission Alignment

Illinois Institute of Technology has as its central mission "To provide distinctive and relevant education in an environment of scientific, technological, and professional knowledge creation and innovation." Further, the university has as its founding purpose the provision of quality education to students of all backgrounds and preparing our students for meaningful roles in a changing industrial society. Offering a reduced credit, 3-year bachelor's program for students aligns with this mission by making education more affordable and accessible while retaining our academic rigor and focus on career readiness. In areas like medicine, where advanced professional study is required, the traditional 4-year degree can delay career entry and, due to limitations on available educational funding [source], limit access to these professions. Given shortages in key medical professions, this is a concern not only for individuals who wish to enter these careers, but also for the nation.

Criterion 2 Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct

Illinois Tech will ensure that reduced credit programs are described transparently on all university materials. The reduced credit bachelor's degree programs will be clearly labeled as reduced credit programs (for example: "Bachelors of Science (B.S.) in Biology" is the name of a traditional 4-year program while "Bachelors in Health Science (B.H.S.)" would be the name of a 3-year program).

Messaging will make clear that these reduced credit degrees are tailored for those with a more focused professional interest, and students in these programs are less likely to have significant free electives or the capacity for a minor. These degrees serve students eager to complete their education and join the workforce or pursue further professional training while meeting the same rigorous academic standards we apply to all our degrees.

All students, on either the traditional or reduced credit degree pathway, will have the same admission standards, complete the same core curriculum requirements, and have access to the same university supports and resources. This is central to establishing and maintaining the rigor of all bachelor's degrees on campus, both standard and reduced credit.

Messaging will make clear that the reduced credit option is for those students focused on professional pathways. Because students meet the same admission standards, students who initially matriculate into the 3-year program will have the ability to convert to the standard program if they decide to do so.

The majority of programs for which this is appropriate are those that do not require licensure, and in the event a program in a licensure-based field considers developing a reduced credit bachelor's, the approval process will include review of any possible licensure issues for students.

Criterion 3: Teaching and Learning for Student Success

Reduced credit programs must go through the standard program review and assessment processes that are used for all degrees on campus. Proposals are reviewed by the relevant academic unit(s), department chair(s), and dean(s) as well as the Undergraduate Studies Committee and the broader faculty council.

The first 5 years of any reduced credit degree are considered a pilot period, during which the program must be assessed at least twice. At the end of 5 years, the program can either be sunset or made permanent, based on the recommendations of the program faculty, faculty governance, and other stakeholders.

If concerns are raised on an initial evaluation, and the program does not show improvement at a second evaluation, the program should be placed on probationary status; if a third evaluation shows improvement, it may be taken off this status, but if there is no improvement, the program must be sunset.

Reduced credit program proposals must have distinct and explicitly defined learning outcomes. Reduced credit and traditional programs in similar areas maybe be assessed on a similar cycle but must have distinct processes (ie, artifacts for the two programs should not be combined).

Any major, including one offered as part of a reduced bachelor's program, must have at least 33 credit hours in the major. Further, any bachelor's degree program must meet the core curriculum standards, regardless of whether that degree is traditional or reduced credit.

Criterion 4 Sustainability, Institutional Effectiveness, Resources and Planning

The Undergraduate Studies Committee, University Faculty Council, and general faculty body will all be consulted to refine and review the reduced credit bachelor's process as proposed in this document. The proposal will be revised based on feedback at each stage, and a minimum of two town halls to discuss the proposal will be held prior to full faculty review.

Illinois Tech is currently undergoing a strategic planning process, with a focus in part on meeting more learners where they are. To date, we have pursued this through strategic partnerships with online education vendors and with international partner institutions and campuses, including, notably, a campus in India. Reduced credit bachelor's degrees align clearly with this strategic goal and will make the university more accessible for our diverse student body, particularly our large population of first-generation college students and returning students.

Many of the degrees we offer feed into professions where experience and education are equally valued; providing opportunities for students to more efficiently complete a rigorous degree will serve students in these fields well, enabling them to enter the workforce more quickly or, if returning, to complete their degrees with a level of focus appropriate to their professional expertise and ambitions. Reduced credit bachelor's degrees are a logical extension of the university's strategy and our goal to meet learners where they are and to serve students of all backgrounds.

Initial Proposal: Accelerated Bachelor's in Health Science (B.H.S.)

The rationale for this reduced credit degree arises from increasing pressure in higher education to reduce student debt and meet healthcare workforce shortages. The 2020 AAMC update on physician education dept (source) indicated that for indebted students, the amount of debt is rising, despite some other positive trends. In response to these trends, some health professional schools are addressing these pressures by creating 3 year MD pathways (source). The AAMC also advocated for preserving many of the student aid programs for health professional students (source), and while unsuccessful, the financing of a medical education remains an area of focus for the AAMC, as well as health professions advisors (as evidenced by topics at the upcoming summer conference for advisors).

Medical schools "do not care what the degree is in, only that the student has prerequisite coursework" (and other professional preparation). We have preliminary feedback that certain health professional schools (MD, DO, Optometry) would be open to accepting this 3-year degree. Building this into a publicizable pipeline in addition to our other dual/early admission programs will increase marketability as a mark of quality of our pre-health programs.

The program as a 3-year degree can produce an efficient route to careers that do not require a MS degree (biotechnology, medical informatics, health technology) and involve business and technology skills that are increasing part of health management, and which IL Tech is well positioned to deliver

The program will provide pathways to 4 Y degrees here in related fields. Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry are natural and likely feasible in 1 year. We will explore other options such as Biomedical Engineering, Chemical and Biological Engineering, and Data Science. In addition, the degree has room

for additional credentials and offers a path to Plus 1 MS degree programs. As a feeder to medical careers, such a degree is positioned not as a universal pre-med substitute, but as a deliberately aligned career preparatory pathway designed as an academic on-ramp providing both an efficient off ramp to careers in 3 years, as well as a flexible pathway to more advance credentials, depending on the student and the circumstances. It supports earlier entry into health-adjacent roles such as medical technologist pathways, clinical research coordination, health informatics, regulatory science, and biotech operations which increasingly value bachelor-level analytical capability paired with applied technical competence, rather than disciplinary coverage alone.

Because of this alignment with professional schools and the strong market demand (both among students seeking pathways into the health professions and among employers who need to hire from these areas), this is a logical launch program.

The Bachelor of Health Science curriculum can be found here: 3 Year Health Sciences.xlsx and a sample schedule is shown below.

Bachelor of Health Science (B.H.S.)

90 credits

Year 1			
Semester 1	**Hours**	**Semester 2**	**Hours**
ITP	2	HUM 100	3
BIOL 107	3	BIOL 115	3
BIOL 109	1	BIOL 117	1
CHEM 122	3	CHEM 126	3
CHEM 123	1	CHEM 140	1
MATH 148	4	Statistics	3
Total	14	Total	14

Year 2			
Semester 1	**Hours**	**Semester 2**	**Hours**
BIOL 214	3	CHEM 239	3
CHEM 235	3	CHEM 240	1
CHEM 236	1	PHYS 211	4
PHYS 113	4	SOC 180	3
PSYC 121	3	COM	3
Free Elective	2	CS	2
Total	16	Total	16

Year 3			
Semester 1	**Hours**	**Semester 2**	**Hours**
BIOL 445	3	BIOL 402	3
BIOL 301	3	SSCI	3

PSYC	3	PHIL	3
IPRO	3	IPRO	3
Free Elective	3	Free Elective	3
Total	15	Total	16