Understand your course   (4 pages)

It's important that you spend some time ensuring that you understand your course (or your 'programme', as it is also called). You may have done some research when you were applying to NUI Galway, or when you accepted your offer of a place – but there is still more to learn!

Some of the terminologies, rules and procedures at university can be a bit confusing; we try to make sense of some of them here. See also the **Glossary** in the Getting started section of the online Academic Skills Hub for more definitions.

How long is your course? Most degree courses are either three or four years long. Sometimes you can opt to spend a year abroad, thus adding a year to your degree. The academic year is made up of two semesters, each of which usually incorporates twelve weeks of teaching, one study week, and two to three weeks of exams. It does not equate to a full calendar year. Most final-year students complete a thesis, dissertation or final year project, which may be done over the summer.

Course instance and stream: Your course instance is a code that summarises your year of study and the course that you are taking. This is not related in any way to the CAO code for your programme. The first number of the code denotes your year of study and the letters denote your course. For example, 1BAJ1 is the unique code for the first year of the Bachelor of Arts with Journalism, while 3BG1 is the unique code for the third year of the Bachelor of Engineering (Biomedical Engineering).

Some courses have different 'streams' within them, depending on such things as whether you will spend a year abroad, specialise in a particular area, or take particular modules. The last number denotes your stream. For example, the course instance 1BC2 denotes a first-year student doing the Bachelor of Commerce with French (the '2' denotes the French stream), while the course instance

3BA8 denotes a third-year student of the Bachelor of Arts (Public and Social Policy) who is spending a year abroad (here, the '8' denotes the international stream). It can be useful to know your course instance and course stream, especially when searching for past exam papers through the Library website.

Modules and module codes: Each module (or subject) that you take also has a unique code. You will see these codes when you register for individual modules, log in to Blackboard, or consult past exam papers. The module code is made up of some letters that denote the subject area (for example, AC for Ancient Classics or OC for Oceanography) followed by some numbers. For example, the module code SP159 is the unique code denoting the module Concepts and Practices in Politics & Society, while the module code NS306 denotes the module Neurophysiology.

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System): ECTS are a measure of the work that the average student will complete in order to achieve the learning outcomes for a specific module. Each module is assigned a number of ECTS or credits – usually 5, but sometimes 10 or 15 – and generally full-time undergraduate students take a maximum of 60 ECTS per academic year. ECTS help to make courses and qualifications comparable across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond. As a general rule of thumb, one credit corresponds to 25 – 30 hours of work, which means that full-time students are looking at a commitment of between 1,500 and 1,800 hours in the academic year. This includes time spent in class and taking exams, as well as studying and completing coursework outside of class. As people learn at different paces, you may find that you need more or less time than this.

'Course' outlines: Many lecturers will provide 'course' (more properly called 'module') outlines, setting out information such as the learning outcomes you are expected to achieve, the topics that will be covered, details of assignments, coursework and exams, and, possibly, reading lists, for their modules. These are key documents: make sure that you find, read, save, and follow them.

Grading system: Grading systems at university differ from those in schools and other educational settings. You may find that your lecturers and tutors use different systems when returning grades: some may give you a percentage mark, others a 'letter' grade, and still others a so-called 'honours' grade. See the list below, but do check in with your lecturer or tutor if you are unsure.

Percentage band	Letter grade	Honours	Also known as…
70% +	A	H1	A 'first', 'first-class honours', or a 1:1
60 – 69%	B	H2.1	'Second-class honours, grade 1' or a 2:1
50 – 59%	C	H2.2	'Second-class honours, grade 2' or a 2:2
40 – 49%	D	H3	'Third-class honours' or a 'Pass'
< 40%	E	Fail	'Unsuccessful'

Pass marks: Make sure that you know the pass mark for the different modules that you are taking. For most modules, 40% is the pass mark, but there are exceptions (for example, in Medicine and Health Science programmes, the pass mark is 50%). In some circumstances, if you achieve a mark of between 35 – 40% for a module, you may be permitted to 'pass by compensation'. You can find out more about this and many other university rules by consulting NUI Galway's **Undergraduate Marks and Standards** document, available on the NUI Galway website at

http://www.nuigalway.ie/academic_records/documents/qa228_undergraduate_marks_and_standards.pdf.

Opportunities for work placement, work-based learning, and study abroad: Some courses have built-in work placement requirements or opportunities to work or study abroad. Other courses may allow you to apply or compete for such opportunities. If you are studying Nursing or Medicine, for example, you will be required to spend a significant amount of time in health care settings. If you are taking a course such as the Bachelor of Commerce (International Hotel Management), or studying a language to degree level, you will be spending at least one semester or year abroad.

NUI Galway's Professional Experience Programme (http://www.nuigalway.ie/career-development-centre/servicesforstudents/placement/) seeks to give students on selected undergraduate programmes opportunities to experience extended work-based learning. In addition, second-year Arts and Commerce students can apply to spend a year in the US or in Europe, studying through English.

Find out more

See your College's first-year Academic Booklet and your Student Guide for more information to help you understand your course. You can also ask some or all of the following people questions about your course:

- Your programme or course director or coordinator
- Your head of year (many disciplines nominate individuals with responsibility for all of the students taking modules in that discipline in first, second, third and subsequent years)
- Your first-year or academic advisor (some Colleges will assign you to a first-year advisor)
- Administrative staff in your College, School, or Disciplines
- You can also check your course facts with your classmates, mentor, or CÉIM/PAL leader