Biological Systems Engineering FAQs

The following are some questions students frequently have about the BSE major. If you have other questions please reach out to the student services coordinator Betsy Wood (betsy.wood@wisc.edu) or the department chair Troy Runge (trunge@wisc.edu).

Q: Is this a real engineering degree?
A: The BSE program, like all engineering programs on the UW-Madison campus, is accredited by ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). Accreditation by ABET is an indication of program quality and has major benefits for individuals seeking registration as a licensed professional engineer.

Q: Why isn’t BSE in the College of Engineering (CoE)?
A: Historically BSE traces its roots to Agricultural Engineering which was in the College of Agriculture and Life Science (CALS). The program enjoys the benefits of being in CALS while having access to the CoE.

Q: What are some of the benefits of BSE?
A: By being in CALS, BSE students pay standard tuition, are able to access both the CoE and CALS job fairs and can take advantage of one-on-one advising and smaller class sizes. We have our computer lab with CAE software and a large machinery shop that students are encouraged to use.

Q: Do I need to apply to the major?
A: Once a student applies to the BSE major they become a pre-engineering student and can take engineering classes. After 17 credits of math and science with at least a 2.65 GPA, students are admitted fully into the program. Due to BSE’s smaller program size than traditional engineering majors, we admit all students that meet the grade requirements.

Q: Are the lots of jobs for BSE graduates?
Job opportunities for BSE graduates remain plentiful and show no signs of decreasing given (1) the increase in world population and corresponding increasing need for food, fiber and renewable energy, (2) the measureable shortage of highly trained technical personnel in the United States, and (3) the constantly expanding emphasis on protection and conservation of natural resources.

Q: What are typical starting salaries?
A: BSE undergraduate typically have starting salaries between $60,000 to $70,000. Governmental agency and non-profit typically are on the lower end of the scale.

Q: How many credits do I need for a BS Degree from BSE?
A: Students need 125 credits, similar to most engineering degrees.

Q: Do I take normal engineering classes?
A: Yes, as an accredited engineering major, you will need to take the same standard core engineering classes including calculus/differential equations, chemistry, physics, statics, thermodynamics, and fluids just to name a few along with your specialized engineering classes. We do offer many of these classes within the major and rely upon the CoE for teaching others.

Q: Will my specialization show on my degree?
A: Students who complete all degree requirements are awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biological Systems Engineering. A student who completes one of the three program specializations will have the area of specialization identified on their official transcript.