

Building the 90: Redesigning a High- Value Bachelor's Degree

ELEVATE Breakout Session

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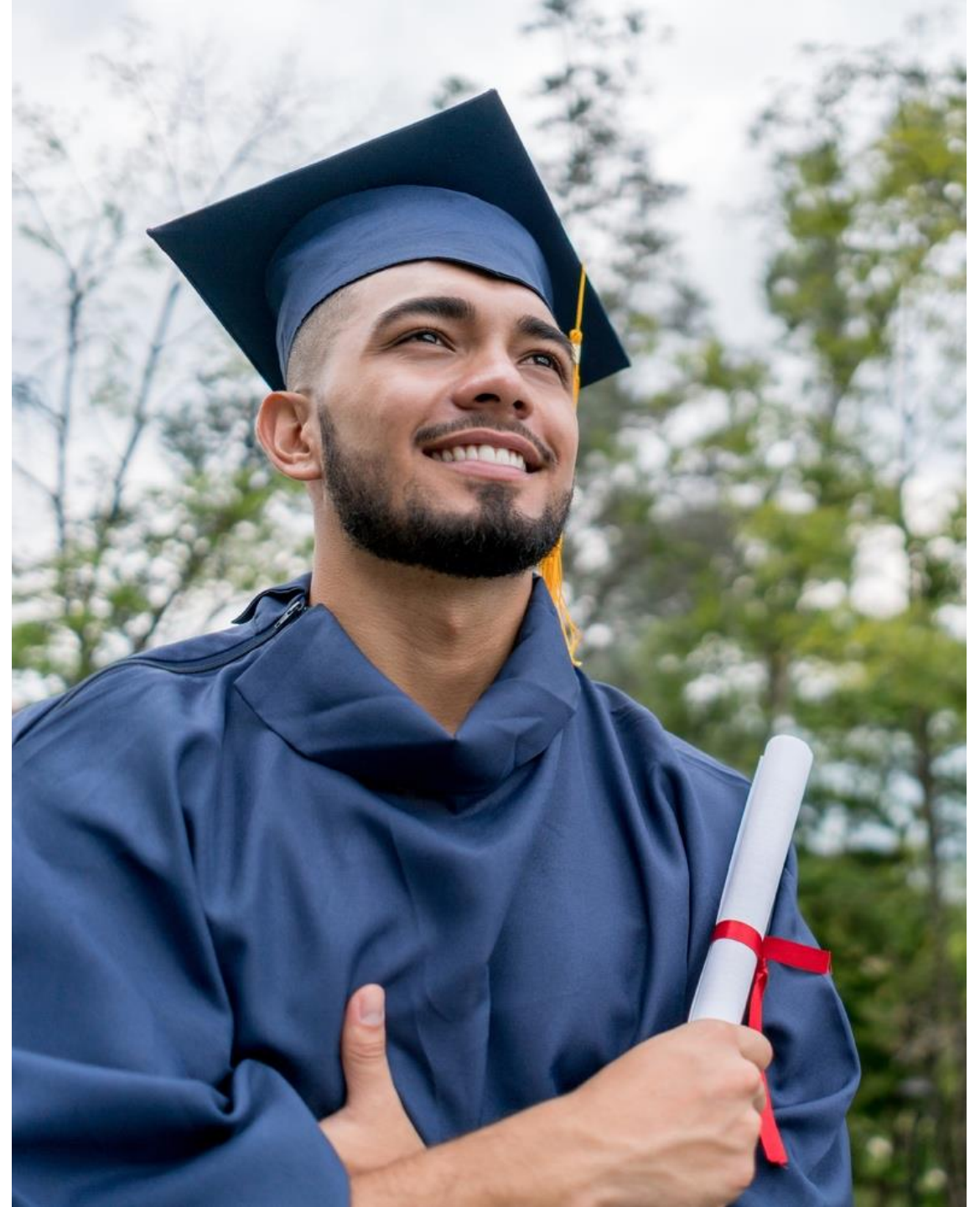


Framing

The 120-credit bachelor's degree has long been treated as a fixed structure, even as completion, affordability, time, and perceived value remain concerns.

The bachelor's degree still carries labor-market and quality-of-life value, so the question is how to redesign without diminishing it.

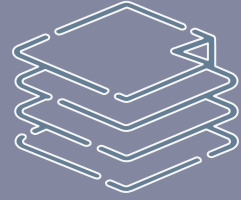
What must a graduate know, be able to do, and experience—and what is the most coherent way to get them there in less time?



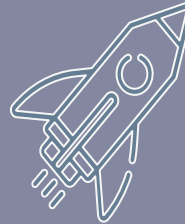


**“The challenge is not to
design better objects, but
to design better systems.”
— Donella Meadows**

Assumptions to guide shift in systems-thinking



Reframe from “reducing”
to “building.”



Position as an
alternative pathway,
not the only pathway.

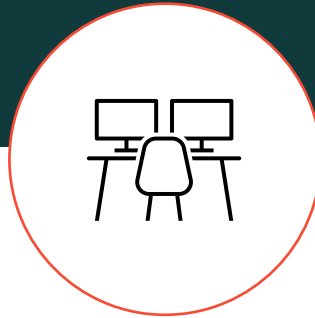


Students are the ultimate
stakeholders.

Where would the fight begin?



If you were told tomorrow that one of your bachelor's programs had to move from 120 to 90 credits, where would the fight begin?



What does that reaction tell you about what your institution believes is essential to a bachelor's degree?"



Think about your own bachelor's experience: what was genuinely valuable, and what might you design differently now?

Southeast Missouri State University

SEMO launched its first reduced-credit bachelor's degrees in Fall 2026, replacing its 120-credit Criminal Justice bachelor's degree with a 90-credit degree.

- **Programs of Study:** Criminal Justice
- **Number of Credits:** 90 credits
- **Format:** Online and in-person degree program
- **Institution Type & Location:** Public university in Missouri



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Southeast Missouri State University

Design Features of CJ Degree

- Elimination of all free electives
- Increased major from 45 to 48 hours
- Increased rigor by raising the number of upper-division courses
- Created "Experiential Learning" Capstone Requirement
 - Directed research with faculty member
 - Travel Study
 - Internship
 - Law Enforcement Academy (18 credit hours)
 - Credit for Prior Learning



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From one case to the field

Not every program is an equally strong candidate, and the right starting point depends on students, outcomes, workforce need, institutional mission, regulatory conditions, and implementation capacity.

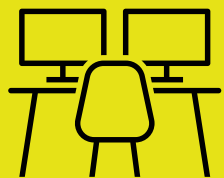


Program Identification

- What problem is the institution trying to solve?
- Which students would benefit?
- Is there a clear workforce, transfer, completion, or affordability rationale?
- Which learning outcomes and requirements are truly non-negotiable?
- Is there enough curricular flexibility to redesign coherently?
- What data and stakeholder validation are available?

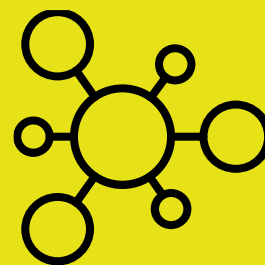


Design Principles



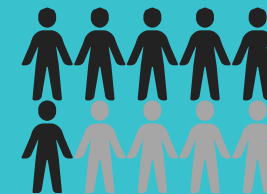
What should institutions protect when designing around learning rather than seat time?

How do we know the resulting degree is high quality?

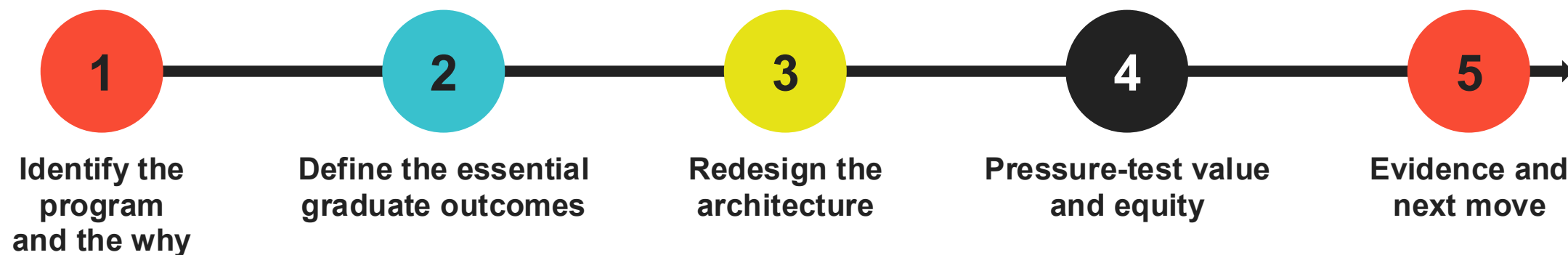


How can assessment demonstrate disciplinary depth, general learning, durable skills, applied learning, and readiness for further study or work?

How does dual credit factor in?



Identify and Build the 90



Takeaways and Learnings

1. What assumption about the bachelor's degree are you leaving ready to question?
2. What is one conversation or action you will take next?

**Thank you and let's
keep in touch as we
innovate and test
new approaches!**





JFF