UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – Bachelor of Specialized Studies & Associate in Individualized Studies

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- B.S.S. Bachelor of Specialized Studies
- A.I.S. Associate in Individualized Studies

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2006

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to school director and the dean, their responses are attached.
Ohio University Department of Bachelor of Specialized Studies/Associate in Individualized Studies
Seven-Year Review

Report of the Review Committee

Review Conducted November 7th and 8th, 2016

Report Date: November 11, 2016

Overview

This report summarizes the Seven-Year Review of Ohio University’s Bachelor of Specialized Studies (B.S.S.) and Associate of Individualized Studies (A.I.S.) programs. [To conserve notation, the report will reference the B.S.S. program. The conclusions regarding the B.S.S. program are equally applicable to the A.I.S. program.] The review was conducted on November 7th and 8th on the Athens campus. The review committee consisted of two internal reviewers (Dr. Trevor Roycroft and Dr. David Castle) and one external reviewer (Dr. Evan Widders, West Virginia University).

The committee commends the staff that serve students and enable the continued success of the program. The committee is of the opinion that the program is conditionally viable, but has concerns with elements of the structure and design of the program.

Although naming is not always consistent, programs like the B.S.S. program exist at nearly every large public university. The need for programs that enable degree completion, student retention, and flexible curricula is nearly universal in public higher education. These programs can be broken down into three rough types.

**Multidisciplinary Studies Programs**—Curriculum emphasizes acquiring disciplinary competence in two or three different academic areas. These are usually large programs, 300-600 students, and focus on retention and graduation issues. West Virginia University’s Multidisciplinary Studies¹ or Arizona State’s 2,000 student interdisciplinary studies program² are good examples.

**Interdisciplinary Studies Programs**—Curriculum emphasizes acquiring disciplinary competence in different academic disciplines or interdisciplinary coursework (American Studies for instance). Critically, the disciplinary coursework is supplemented by programmatic coursework teaching interdisciplinary theory and disciplinary integration. These are usually smaller programs that emphasize cohort building and pathways to graduate studies. They often have dedicated faculty and associate faculty who are prepared to teach interdisciplinary theory.

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¹ [http://mds.wvu.edu](http://mds.wvu.edu)
² [https://webapp4.asu.edu/programs/t5/majorinfo/ASU00/LSBJSIBIS/undergrad/false](https://webapp4.asu.edu/programs/t5/majorinfo/ASU00/LSBJSIBIS/undergrad/false)
and integration. Utah Valley State’s Integrated Studies program\(^3\) or Miami of Ohio’s Western Program\(^4\) are examples.

**Individualized Studies Programs**—Curriculum development is process based and usually negotiated between the student, faculty, and advisors. If these programs are large, like NYU’s Gallatin School,\(^5\) they require significant faculty and advising resources due to the complexity of the curriculum. Most individualized studies programs are small and informal.

The review committee finds elements of these three approaches in its review of the B.S.S. program. The B.S.S primarily mirrors the Multidisciplinary Studies approach, in that it serves a large number of students. However, there are elements of Individualized Studies Programs in its approach to advising and curricular design. The review committee finds evidence that the lack of structure associated with the B.S.S program results in a good deal of negotiation between students and faculty that support the program, resulting in an intensive advising process. Furthermore, as the B.S.S also serves students who desire a true individualized/interdisciplinary approach, the B.S.S program combines elements of these two alternative approaches. As will be discussed further below, the overarching lack of structure associated with the B.S.S program results in complexities that are not present with programs that follow one of the single-focus approaches described above.

1. **Observations on the program as a whole:**

   a. **Is the current number and distribution of faculty sufficient to carry out the broad overall mission of the Department (Teaching; Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity; Service)?**

   Because the program does not have faculty, this question is mostly outside the scope of the review. The review committee met with B.S.S. faculty reviewers who are assisting the program. These B.S.S. faculty reviewers should be commended for their commitment to student success, and their willingness to assist with the successful design of the B.S.S/A.I.S. plans of study. Based on discussions with B.S.S. faculty reviewers, the review committee concludes that this faculty contribution represents a time-consuming task. Those who serve the most B.S.S. students include chairs of large departments, and they also give generously of their time to the program.

   b. **Is the level of the Department’s RSCA appropriate for the program given the size of the faculty and the resources available to the Department? Is the Department’s level of external funding at an appropriate level?**

   Given the nature of the program, this element is outside of the scope of review.

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\(^3\) [http://www.uvu.edu/is](http://www.uvu.edu/is)

\(^4\) [http://miamioh.edu/academics/majors-minors/majors/individualized-studies.html](http://miamioh.edu/academics/majors-minors/majors/individualized-studies.html)

\(^5\) [https://gallatin.nyu.edu](https://gallatin.nyu.edu)
c. **Is the level of service, outside of teaching; appropriate for the program given its size and the role that it plays in the University and broader communities it interacts with? Is the Department able to fulfill its service mission?**

Given the nature of the program, this element is outside of the scope of review.

d. **Does the Department have an appropriate level of financial resources, staff, physical facilities, library resources, and technology to fulfill its mission?**

The program review revealed deficiencies with regard to the level of staff available for advising students in the program. The staffing level currently provides for two (2) full-time equivalent positions (spread across four individuals) to serve the approximately 600 students who are enrolled in the B.S.S degree program. One of the advisors directs the program and serves 90 students, two other advisors currently serve over 100 students, and a third serves about 150.

The review committee believes that the advising process for the B.S.S is highly complex. The review committee finds that B.S.S advisors generally face two types of students. The majority of students, typically juniors or seniors, design degree programs that are largely based on their completed academic coursework, which may or may not readily lend itself to an efficient pathway to degree completion. A smaller number of students have clear ideas about an individualized approach to study, and are more likely to enter the B.S.S program earlier in their academic careers. Both types of students present their own challenges, and the advising resources available are strained in meeting student demands. For example, given current resource constraints, the bi-annual course scheduling process is limited to 30-minute individual sessions during the “advising week” period and ad hoc workshops often held outside of regular advising hours. Student plans include specific course requirements, and given the tremendous variety of course requirements that are associated with student plans, advisors face the daunting task of identifying course availability well in advance, which, given the vagaries of course availability, will change from department to department and semester to semester.

It is the opinion of the review committee that the staff is doing the best they can, given the circumstances, but that more resources are needed. Certainly, the demands that are placed on the advisors cannot contribute to the desirable outcome of continuity of staff, and the short tenure associated with the present cohort of advisors indicates that turnover in these positions is an issue. The current advising workload is certainly not a positive element of the advising process, nor can it positively affect the mission of the B.S.S program. The development of the expertise to undertake complex advising tasks, and to understand the nuances of the institution, with all of its various departments, should be encouraged by expanding advising resources. The reviewer committee believes that resources sufficient to enable a lower number of advisees per advisor, and a longer time slot associated with each advisee during the bi-annual “advising week” period would be reasonable.

The review committee notes that the current non-academic location of the B.S.S program in University College may be problematic from the standpoint of access to resources and may undermine the program’s status with students and other stakeholders. The best practice for
placement of similar degree programs in other institutions is in an academic unit where it will receive academic oversight and be rewarded for enrollment gains. Location in an academic unit may also improve faculty involvement.

The B.S.S. program, while contributing a large number of students and graduates, does not seem to garner additional resources commensurate with its level of student success. Due to its core mission of providing student support services, University College budgetary planning may not be able to prioritize the additional needs of the B.S.S. program. Perhaps a lack of higher-level advocacy for the program, combined with frequent administrative turnover, has contributed to the notable lack of advising resources available in a 600 student academic program.

2. **Undergraduate Program:**

   a. **Is the Department fulfilling its service role, adequately preparing non-majors for future coursework and/or satisfying the needs for general education?**

   The B.S.S program plays an important service role. Because the majority of B.S.S students are at risk of not completing a degree, the B.S.S plays a critical role in student retention, and ultimately encourages student success in completing a bachelor’s degree. The B.S.S, through advising and the optional capstone class, also presents students with preparation and planning for future graduate study.

   b. **Is the program attracting majors likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of majors appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?**

   The program is designed to assist students who are not finding success in other major areas in the university as well as students who desire an individualized curriculum. Program statistics indicate that students who enter the B.S.S are fairly well representative in terms of gender, and generally match university demographics associated with race and ethnicity.

   c. **Does the undergraduate curriculum provide majors with an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers or graduate work following graduation?**

   Self-reported statistics through 2010 indicate that students have achieved success in the job market and in graduate school. However, the data provided are not up-to-date, and the quality of this data is unclear. Reinstituting data collection in this area is advisable. Encouraging students to become LinkedIn users is one efficient way to track student activities following graduation.

   d. **Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the undergraduate program?**

   Given the nature of the program, this element is outside of the scope of review.

   e. **Are pedagogical practices appropriate? Is teaching adequately assessed?**
There is no mandatory programmatic coursework, which is a weakness of the program, undermining opportunities for unifying pedagogical practices and assessment. Teaching assessment is subsumed in the programs relied upon by the student concentration areas, rendering collection and analysis of programmatic assessment data problematic.

f. Are students able to move into discipline-related careers and/or pursue further academic work?

Self-reported statistics through 2010 indicate that students have achieved success in the job market and in graduate school. However, the data provided are not up-to-date, and the quality of this data is unclear. Reinstating data collection in this area is advisable. Encouraging students to become LinkedIn users is one efficient way to track student activities following graduation.

3. Graduate Program:

Given the nature of the program, this element is outside of the scope of review.

4. Areas of concern:

Curricular Concerns:

The process of student initiated, individualized curricular design practiced in B.S.S. is overly complicated, inefficient, and inappropriately taxes both advising and faculty resources. Designing an individualized curriculum for over 600 students with the resources available to the B.S.S. program is impractical at best. Other specific problems identified include:

- The process of declaring the degree is overly complicated. Students, faculty, and advisors must collaborate and agree on an overly-articulated plan. Effectively, this hinders smooth major changes and endangers compliance with the NCAA and Military Tuition Assistance program—in the B.S.S. program upper-classmen are required to remain as pre-majors until their application is complete. It may also eventually cause difficulties for financial aid recipients as well.

- There is no required B.S.S. coursework. This inhibits cohort building and, critically, renders assessment of learning objective attainment across the student body prohibitively difficult.

- The complexity inherent in creating a unique path to graduation for over 600 students is exceedingly labor intensive. E-campus and on-campus B.S.S. advisors have repeatedly indicated that B.S.S. students are significantly more time-consuming than other advisees.

- The very specific curricular plans generated in the B.S.S. major declaration process require frequent changes due to changes in course offerings or availability and shifting student needs. Frequent changes to the faculty/departmentally approved plan of study may raise questions concerning proper academic oversight of the degree curriculum. For e-campus students, faculty oversight of the degree plan and matriculation is limited or non-existent after the initial approval process.
• Although the process for declaring the degree mimics the procedures for creating an individualized major, advisor/student imperatives for timely graduation and curricular efficacy (most students are already seniors) signifies that, in many cases, the path of least resistance to graduation is the most practical. The imperative for senior graduation creates an impetus for expedient, rather than academically meaningful, curricular choices.

Recommendations:

• In addition to the existing processes for creating an individualized program, we recommend the creation of a defined multidisciplinary curriculum based on faculty-approved learning blocks (e.g., minors, certificates, areas of emphasis, etc.). Ideally, these blocks would provide for some measure of curricular flexibility (e.g., choose three 3XXX level History courses, rather than defining each specific course needed for degree completion) and would have defined learning outcomes.

The majority of B.S.S. students would be encouraged to design their curriculum based on the faculty-approved learning blocks (see examples below). This approach would reduce barriers to program entry and improve retention. It would also reduce the need for faculty approval of the degree plan (the structure of the learning blocks would have already been departmentally approved by discipline) and allow advisors to quickly adjust DARs to the plan of study. Learning blocks would improve the assessment of outcomes, as a defined multidisciplinary curriculum would be based on a more standardized foundation, and include the benefits of the curricular design that are inherent in established minors, certificates, or other faculty-defined learning blocks. Entry into the degree would be streamlined and students would be able to begin completing the curriculum earlier. In cases where a more individualized plan was desired, the student could follow the current procedure or combine the two.

In addition to improving outcomes for students, the addition of defined pathways has the advantage of improving the efficiency of advising without requiring as much additional expenditure on the expansion of advising staff. It also has the benefit of utilizing the existing, and departmentally approved, curriculum associated with minors and certificates. Finally, this approach reduces the burden on outside faculty, while continuing to enable individualized study for highly motivated students.

• Require a mandatory introductory and capstone course, the latter preferably taught by academic faculty. These courses should encourage cohort building, define and pursue programmatic learning outcomes, and provide data for programmatic assessment. The introductory course would reduce the need for advisors to provide individual instruction to each student regarding the merits and guidelines of the B.S.S. degree. The capstone should encourage some disciplinary integration, educate students on the degree’s
versatility post-baccalaureate, and assist in achieving desired student outcomes such as career obtainment or graduate school application.

- Increase the available advising resources.

6. **Commendations.**

The review committee believes that the staff and faculty advisors associated with the program are doing an excellent job, given the resources available and the limitations associated with the structure of the program. Program staff experience a heavy workload, but appear to provide high quality advising to students. Supporting faculty deserve special recognition for their efforts, and the recognition of service to the B.S.S. program should be identified and recognized in the P&T process.

7. **Overall judgment: Is the program viable as a whole?**

The program is viable, but suffers from the inefficiencies and resource limitations outlined above. Implementation of the recommendations would improve outcomes for students and other stakeholders, and enable the potential for improved success in retention, assessment, and academic outcomes.
Appendix: Examples of Learning Blocks

The learning blocks in this case are approved minor offerings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports Studies</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Communication Studies</th>
<th>Sport and Exercise Psychology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Speech Communication</td>
<td>Sports Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Communication</td>
<td>Sport and Exercise Psychology</td>
<td>Physical Trainer</td>
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Recommended for students interested in pursuing a business-oriented curriculum.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Business Applications</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Entrepreneurship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Speech Pathology</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Child Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
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Recommended for students interested in pursuing a liberal arts curriculum.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liberal Arts and Sciences</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>International Studies</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Professional Writing</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Religious Studies</td>
<td>History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Child Development</td>
<td>English</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Leadership Studies</td>
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Recommended for students interested in pursuing a business communication curriculum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotions and Publicity</th>
<th>Public Relations</th>
<th>Advertising</th>
<th>Communication Studies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Professional Writing</td>
<td>Sports Communication</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Public Relations</td>
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From West Virginia University’s Multidisciplinary Studies Program:

MDS Program Learning Objectives:

1. **Knowledge**
   A. Broad-based knowledge of three discrete areas of study
   B. Understanding of synergistic advantage of multidisciplinary curriculum

2. **Skills**
   A. Ability to think critically in each of three disciplines
   B. Ability to partition and interpret information or events using the most appropriate discipline’s toolset
C. Ability to write a professional resume, conduct a job interview, and apply to graduate school
D. Ability to research and write a research paper

3. Attitudes
   A. Positive attitude towards civic action, nonprofit organizations, and community engagement

4. Integrative Learning
   A. Ability to explain Multidisciplinary Studies and its advantages to others
   B. Ability to apply academic knowledge to contemporary political, social, scientific, and humanitarian questions

From West Virginia University’s Interdisciplinary Studies Program:

Interdisciplinary Studies Program Learning Objectives:

1. Integrate disciplinary perspectives and apply interdisciplinary research methods to contemporary political, social, scientific, and humanitarian questions.
2. Apply core theories of the three primary component disciplines of their degree to construct informed analyses and frame creative propositions.
3. Analyze sources from an interdisciplinary perspective.
4. Use critical thinking skills to formulate and defend positions by developing, supporting and presenting information clearly in written, verbal, visual, and mediated forms.
5. Communicate clearly in written and oral form the value of an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving as an alternative or supplement to discipline-based academic research.
6. Successfully apply for graduate school or post baccalaureate degree job placement.
December 5, 2016

Professor David Ingram
University Curriculum Council
Ohio University
Alden Library 301G
Athens, Ohio 45701

Dear Professor Ingram:

I want to express my gratitude to you, Dr. Patrick Barr-Melej, Peter Mather and both our internal and external reviewers for the time and care put into our B.S.S. and A.I.S. review process. As a new director of degree programs, I’m grateful for the recommendations provided by the reviewers that were driven by both the self-study data and review visit interviews.

Our program reviewers identified a number of structural, curricular, and resource concerns in the program review. I’m excited to implement the actions identified by Dr. Peter Mather that were inspired by the program reviewer’s recommendations. These are great opportunities to develop structural sustainability, a more efficient curriculum, academic excellence, and in-class assessment planning to move the B.S.S./A.I.S. programs forward.

In closing, I want to thank you and Drs. Patrick Barr-Melej, Peter Mather, Elizabeth Sayrs, Trevor Roycroft, David Castle, and Evan Widders for the opportunity for the program review. I am dedicated to effectively stewarding the growth opportunities ahead for our B.S.S./A.I.S. degree program students.

Warmly,

Julie A. Cohara

Director of Degree Programs, University College
December 5, 2016

Professor David Ingram  
University Curriculum Council  
Ohio University  
Alden Library 301G  
Athens, Ohio 45701

Dear Professor Ingram:

I have read the report on the Bachelor of Specialized Studies (BSS) and Associate of Individualized Studies (AIS) degree programs. I am grateful for the care taken by internal reviewers Drs. Trevor Roycroft and David Castle and external reviewer from West Virginia University, Dr. Evan Widders, in both reviewing our programs and writing the report. I am also grateful to Julie Cohara, our new Director of Degree Programs, for her leadership of the programs and for writing the self-study. Indeed, I want to acknowledge all faculty, staff and students were involved in the process.

It was affirming to see the commendations recognizing the dedication of our University College staff and faculty partners. Additionally, the reasons underlying the recommendations that prompted a conditionally viable rating are opportunities for increased program stability and excellence within University College.

The program reviewers both observed a “lack of structure” to the B.S.S./A.I.S. curricula and labor-intensive individualized major programs for staff. Consequently, the reviewers’ first recommendation was to develop both a streamlined multidisciplinary curriculum and more efficient structure of program delivery. In response to this, the director of degree programs will work with faculty partners over the next three years to create the program reviewers’ suggested learning blocks that will expedite student construction of a multidisciplinary degree. Although the individualized major program design of the present B.S.S./A.I.S. will continue to exist, it is estimated that over two-thirds of students pursuing the B.S.S./A.I.S. who are completion oriented would immediately benefit from the more efficient “block” structure.

A second recommendation was to “require a mandatory introductory and capstone class, the latter preferably taught by academic faculty.” The lack of academic faculty was also a concern in the 2006 self-study. Presently, the four B.S.S./A.I.S. academic advisors (including the director of degree programs) deliver weekly, year-round information/orientation sessions and advising sessions for the degree programs. The degree program director plans on combining the orientation session with other introductory multidisciplinary education learning objectives in a half to two credit hour introductory course. This would also create an opportunity where assessment metrics could be implemented. A two to three year timeline is anticipated for this process.
Additionally, the capstone course was also discussed. When a new Assistant Dean begins in January, 2017, she will work with me and Dean Sayrs (following my interim appointment) to explore ways to appropriately engage faculty in the creation of a substantive, academic capstone course.

Finally, the program reviewers expressed concern about advising resources. The implementation of more effective curricular and advising processes will substantially alleviate overall strain on the degree program staff and faculty partners. Upon her arrival in January, I will ask the new Assistant Dean for University College Advising to evaluate the advising system, including the allocation of staffing across advising teams with an eye on addressing the concerns raised in the program reviews.

The reviewers inaccurately asserted that the degree programs are currently housed in a "non-academic" location. University College is, in fact, an academic unit, and has done significant work to build positive partnerships with other academic departments and colleges. I believe that this history, the staffing synergies with other advising roles, as well as other unique aspects of the Ohio University culture, make University College an appropriate home for these multi-disciplinary degree programs.

In closing, I want to thank you and Drs. Patrick Barr-Melej, Trevor Royncroft, David Castle, and Evan Widder for discharging this important task. We are proud of the BSS and the AIS degree programs and the important dual role they provide as a direct pathway towards completion for our students and an opportunity to design a multidisciplinary, individualized degree program. We will dedicate ourselves to addressing the problems that have been identified. We will be pleased to update University Curriculum Council on our progress in the years to come.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Peter C. Mather, PhD
Interim Dean and Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education