

REVIEW OF THE B.A., B.S. IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: 24.0101
Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies

OVERVIEW

The B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program is administered by University College, a unit that reports directly to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. In addition to the Interdisciplinary Studies program, University College administers the B.A., B.S. in University Studies program, which has also been reviewed during this program review cycle. The last review of the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program occurred in 2010-2011.

University College was established in July 1996 to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of academic support services provided to undergraduate students and to deliver support services to unique student populations. A primary focus of University College today is providing programming that addresses the academic and transitional needs of first-year undergraduate students. Among the units, programs, and services of University College are undergraduate academic advisement, developmental mathematics, first-year seminars, the Julia N. Visor Academic Center, retention services, and orientation and transition services. All first-year students regardless of major (with the exception of those in the University Honors program) are advised by University College. In addition, all students who have not yet declared a major are advised by the unit, regardless of the number of credit hours they have earned. At the time of the 2010-2011 program review, the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program was administered by the Office of the Provost, with student advisement services provided by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. University College has administered the program since October 2015.

The B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program is intended to serve students fitting one of two profiles with respect to their academic goals and circumstances. The Interdisciplinary Studies program is primarily intended to serve students interested in completing a program of study not otherwise offered by the University or a multidisciplinary program of study that spans the offerings of two or more academic units at the University. Students enroll in either the individualized sequence or the multidisciplinary studies sequence. Each student selects a faculty mentor who works with the student and University College advisor to design an individualized plan of study appropriate to the student's academic and career goals. The Interdisciplinary Studies program also serves students who have nearly completed a teacher education program at the University but are unable to graduate from that program. These are students in academic good standing who cannot complete their clinical experiences for reasons unrelated to their academic qualifications. Students in this circumstance enroll in the human and educational services sequence of the Interdisciplinary Studies program, complete any unmet university graduation requirements, and receive their undergraduate degree through the program. But for the human and educational services sequence, students in this circumstance would not be able to graduate from the University in a timely manner. In terms of degrees conferred, the Interdisciplinary Studies program has historically served many more students through the human and educational services sequence than through the individualized sequence or the multidisciplinary studies sequence.

Occasionally, staff or faculty members conflate the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program with the B.A., B.S. in University Studies program, since both have unique academic purposes and both are administered by University College. The B.A., B.S. in University Studies program is intended for students who are unable to meet admission or retention requirements for majors with requirements above the university minimums, students who discover late in their initial program of study that they no longer wish to pursue that career path, or students who have earned 75 or more credit hours without having declared a major.

Enrollment by Plan of Study, Fall Census Day, 2011-2018
B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies, Illinois State University

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Individualized sequence	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	0
Multidisciplinary sequence	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
Human and Educational Services sequence	3	5	5	8	6	9	8	4
Total	3	9	7	10	6	10	8	4

Degrees Conferred by Plan of Study, Graduating Fiscal Year 2011-2018
B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies, Illinois State University

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Individualized sequence	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Multidisciplinary sequence	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
Human and Educational Services sequence	28	51	51	39	29	45	65	47
No sequence	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	28	51	52	40	29	46	67	47

Table notes:

Graduating Fiscal Year consists of summer, fall, and spring terms, in that order. For example, Graduating Fiscal Year 2018 consists of the following terms: summer 2017, fall 2017, and spring 2018.

Fall census day enrollment is not the best indicator of enrollment in the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program during an academic year, because students transferring into the human and educational services sequence of the program typically do so at times during the academic year other than early in the fall semester. It is not unusual for students to transfer into that sequence late in the spring semester, in time for May or August graduation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Program goals

- The Interdisciplinary Studies program enables students to construct individualized programs of study that differ from traditional major or minor programs in order to achieve specific educational and/or career goals.
- The Interdisciplinary Studies program enables students to achieve cognitive and affective learning outcomes beyond those associated with traditional programs. Cognitive learning outcomes include critical thinking, problem solving, contextual understanding, and ability to integrate disciplinary perspectives. Affective learning outcomes include increased self-confidence, sense of empowerment, respect for differences, and ability to work on a team.

Students learning outcomes

Each student enrolling in the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program follows an individualized plan of study with individualized student learning outcomes. The program does not currently have a common set of student learning outcomes applicable to all students.

Program curriculum (2018-2019)

Students enroll in one of three sequences: individualized, multidisciplinary studies, or human and educational services. Regardless of sequence, each student follows an individualized plan of study developed collaboratively by the student, advisor, and, if applicable, faculty mentor.

Graduation requirements (individualized sequence):

120 credit hours including completion of an approved individualized plan of study totaling 36-55 credit hours with courses from at least two academic units and 39 credit hours of General Education courses, with the remainder of

credit hours earned through elective courses. Students are also required to submit a portfolio of relevant coursework documenting the accomplishment of learning objectives associated with the individualized plan of study.

Graduation requirements (multidisciplinary studies sequence):

120 credit hours including completion of an approved individualized plan of study totaling at least 36 credit hours with courses from at least two academic units and 39 credit hours of General Education courses, with the remainder of credit hours earned through elective courses. Students are also required to submit a portfolio of relevant coursework documenting the accomplishment of learning objectives associated with the individualized plan of study. Credit hours earned through completion of the individualized plan of study must include at least 12 senior-college hours (i.e., courses at the 200 or 300 level) from each of two academic units; credit hours earned from any one of the academic units cannot exceed 25.

Graduation requirements (human and educational services sequence):

120 credit hours including completion of an approved individualized plan of study totaling at least 36 credit hours and 39 credit hours of General Education courses, with the remainder of credit hours earned through elective courses. For students who had been enrolled in a teacher education major administered by either the Department of Special Education or the School of Teaching and Learning, the 36 credit hours must include at least 27 credit hours earned in Special Education and/or Teaching and Learning courses, as well as at least 9 credit hours of advisor-approved elective courses from academic units other than Special Education or Teaching and Learning. For students who had been enrolled in a teacher education major administered by some other academic unit, the individualized plan of study consists of at least of 27 credit hours required in an existing major and at least 9 credit hours of advisor-approved elective courses.

Program delivery

The program is offered on the Normal campus.

Courses taken by students in the program may be delivered through face-to-face instruction, blended face-to-face/online instruction, or online instruction.

Program faculty (Fall 2018)

There are no designated teaching faculty members for the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program. Because students enrolled in the program take courses offered through other academic units of the University, any faculty member at the institution may teach a course in which an Interdisciplinary Studies major is enrolled.

Specialized accreditation

The B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program is not affiliated with a specialized accreditation association.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand

Trends external to the Interdisciplinary Studies program and developments internal to the University regarding administration of the program have impacted the program and its students since the 2010-2011 program review. Among the external trends is continuing emphasis in academia on interdisciplinary study, which continues to fuel interest in the individualized and multidisciplinary studies sequences of the program among faculty members and prospective students. Adoption by the Illinois State Board of Education of additional requirements to graduate from an educator preparation program and qualify for teacher licensure has served as a reminder of the importance of the Interdisciplinary Studies program to all educator preparation programs at the University. For students who decide late in their undergraduate career that they are unable or unwilling to complete teacher licensure requirements, the human and educational services sequence provides an alternative path for completing their undergraduate degree. Changes in administration of the Interdisciplinary Studies program since 2010-2011 have delayed progress in further enhancing the program to better serve its students. Three units have administered the program since that last review: the Office of the Provost until 2013, the University Honors program from 2013 to 2015, and University College since then. University College is expected to continue in its role as program administrator during the next program review cycle, which should make progress on program enhancements possible.

Responses to previous program review recommendations

The 2010-2011 program review resulted in recommendations to investigate methods of assessment appropriate to the program, strengthen student and faculty awareness of the program, strengthen the relationship with the University Honors program and participation in it by Interdisciplinary Studies students, and investigate transitioning the human and educational services sequence to the College of Education. Despite the numerous changes in administration of the program since 2010-2011, progress has been made on addressing the recommendations. University College continues to work with University Assessment Services to explore development of an effective assessment plan for the program. The primary challenge in developing such a plan is the lack of student learning outcomes common to all students in the program, since each student follows a unique plan of study. University College has started working with the Office of Admissions so high-achieving students can be made aware of the opportunities to develop individualized plans of study through the Interdisciplinary Studies program. Efforts have been made to provide information about the program to Admissions staff so they, in turn, can inform prospective students about it. Efforts have also been made to outreach to students during recruitment activities such as the Presidential Scholars Interview Day. Relations between the Interdisciplinary Studies program and the University Honors program have been strengthened since the last program review in large part through University Honors administration of the Interdisciplinary Studies program. University Honors worked directly with Interdisciplinary Studies students from July 2013 to October 2015. Exploring the benefits and drawbacks of transitioning the human and educational services sequence to a plan of study administered directly by the College of Education has been delayed because the college has had interim leadership since 2017. Meanwhile, University College has continued to work closely with College of Education advisors to ensure that processes, procedures, and advisement for College of Education students transferring into the human and education services sequence are effective.

Major findings

The Interdisciplinary Studies program continues to provide students with opportunities to work with scholars from multiple disciplines in order to achieve unique academic and career goals. The individualized plans of study developed through the program makes it possible for students to pursue goals they would not otherwise be able to pursue through some other academic program offered by the University. This uniqueness impacts and serves all academic disciplines at the institution. The human and educational services sequence of the program is also unique in that it provides a path toward graduation for students, typically seniors, who have transitioned out of their teacher education program just prior to or during the student teaching experience. Students graduating from that sequence are able to apply the knowledge and skills developed while at the University to subsequent work in many related careers. Through this program review self-study, growth in the number of students creating individualized plans of study through the program and documenting student successes through student learning outcomes assessment and program evaluation have been identified as opportunities for program enhancement. More students at the University would likely pursue individualized plans of study if they knew of the opportunity earlier in their college career. Thus, additional student outreach work is needed. In addition, a plan is needed for assessing and documenting student experiences in the program, including program-wide assessment of student learning and tracking career outcomes of program graduates. Neither of these program enhancements is new, as both were recommendations from the prior program review. The primary obstacle to moving forward with them has been the numerous changes in program administration and student advising since 2010-2011. Having gained experience working with students in the program over the last four years and with no plans to transition the program to another unit, University College is well positioned to move forward with the enhancements during the coming program review cycle.

Initiatives and plans

- Pursue active measures to increase student and faculty awareness of the opportunities for students to develop individualized plans of study through the program. The responsibility for increasing awareness of the program and its benefits should be shared liberally and campus-wide, with particular emphasis on the Office of Admissions, University College, the Honors program, and department/school advisors.
- Continue to enhance collaboration with other interdisciplinary programs offered by the University including the interdisciplinary minors.
- Develop and implement a plan for evaluating the Interdisciplinary Studies program. Alumni tracking should be a key element in assessing the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for their careers.
- Develop and implement a student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Review Outcome. The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks University College for a critical evaluation of strengths, challenges, and opportunities of the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program. The committee appreciates efforts of University College staff to study comparator and aspirational programs, particularly given the differences among interdisciplinary studies programs with respect to their missions, the student populations they serve, and the academic environments in which they exist.

The committee thanks University College for its many contributions to undergraduate education at Illinois State through its work with students in the Interdisciplinary Studies program and the University Studies program and through its services to undergraduate students across all units and programs of the institution. Among those services are advisement for almost all undergraduate students with fewer than 24 credit hours; academic support through tutoring, coaching, and workshops; developmental mathematics courses and tutoring; first-year seminars to help students transition into college; retention services; and orientation and transition services. The committee thanks University College for assuming administrative responsibility for the Interdisciplinary Studies program in fall 2015 and for its work to bring stability to the program. The committee commends University College efforts to further a sense of belonging and community for Interdisciplinary Studies students and to stress the value of the program in furthering their educational and career goals.

The committee recognizes the opportunities the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program provides students to customize a plan of study that meets their unique academic and professional goals. In addition, since 2004 the program has provided opportunities for teacher education students working toward a degree in the College of Education to earn an undergraduate degree if they decide not to complete their teacher education program or are unable to do so. From Fiscal 2011 through Fiscal 2018, approximately 360 students earned their undergraduate degree through the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program, the majority of them former teacher education students.

The committee recognizes achievements of Interdisciplinary Studies students since the prior program review, including one student being nominated for a Bone Scholarship (the highest level of recognition attainable by an Illinois State University student) and being accepted to present at a research conference. A study of alumni employment and earnings completed by University Assessment Services in 2017 documents stable employment and steadily rising income among graduates of the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program.

Through its discussion of the Interdisciplinary Studies program review report, the committee has identified several challenges and opportunities for University College to explore collaboratively with other units at the University. Those challenges and opportunities are set forth in the recommendations that follow. Several recommendations suggest substantive changes to the program that the committee feels merit discussion and action well prior to the next program review on the eight-year cycle. Accordingly, the committee asks University College to consider the committee recommendations and summarize its discussions and any actions taken through two follow-up reports submitted to the committee via the Office of the Provost.

In a first follow-up report, submitted to the committee via the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2020, the committee asks University College to report which recommendations the college is addressing or plans to address, the order in which the college is addressing the recommendations, the parties involved in the discussions, and actions either taken or planned to be taken.

In a second follow-up report, submitted to the committee via the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2022, the committee asks University College to report the status of its efforts to address the recommendations, including any actions taken or planned to be taken.

The committee recognizes that University College has been charged with administering the Interdisciplinary Studies program but may not be empowered to effectuate all of the committee recommendations. The committee suggests

that in considering the recommendations, University College work with the Office of the Provost to which it reports to engage the appropriate shared governance partners and processes in the discussions.

Recommendations. The Academic Planning Committee makes the following observations and recommendations to be addressed by University College. In program review follow-up reports, due May 15, 2020 and May 15, 2022, and in the next self-study report on the eight-year program review cycle, tentatively due October 1, 2026, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

Explore the feasibility of increasing enrollment in the individualized studies and multidisciplinary studies sequences. The committee recognizes the importance of the individualized studies and multidisciplinary studies sequences of the program in allowing students to create plans of study in unique areas of interest. However, the committee observes that fewer than 10 students graduated from those sequences between Fiscal 2011 and Fiscal 2018. The committee believes that more students at the University could benefit from the opportunities the sequences provide. The committee recommends three actions to encourage more participation in the sequences.

First, the committee concurs with University College staff that better promoting the Interdisciplinary Studies program among students, academic advisors, and faculty members should be a priority for the University. The committee encourages such efforts.

Second, the committee recommends re-evaluation by the university community of the premise inherent in admissions requirements for the program: that Interdisciplinary Studies is intended primarily for students whose academic record qualifies them for the University Honors program. The committee observes that there are numerous students who, regardless of grade point average, could thrive academically if able to customize a plan of study that better meets their educational objectives than any traditional academic program offered by the institution. To give more students that opportunity, the committee recommends that the University consider lowering the grade point average requirement for admission to the program.

Third, the committee observes that students enrolled in an interdisciplinary minor offered by the University and interested in expanding their study of the discipline could do so through the Interdisciplinary Studies major. Accordingly, the committee suggests that University College staff continue their collaboration with advisors associated with the interdisciplinary minors to communicate that opportunity to their students.

Before any of those actions are taken, however, the committee urges careful analysis of the feasibility and implications of doing so, particularly with respect to additional resources that may be necessary to provide individualized attention to more students. Among the factors to consider are the additional time needed on the part of University College staff to provide intensive advisement services for additional students and interest among faculty members to serve as academic mentors for the additional students. The committee also observes that expanding program enrollment would likely add to the ongoing challenge of enrolling Interdisciplinary Studies students in 300-level (senior-level) courses.

Consider merging or disestablishing sequences to simplify the program and focus its mission. The committee appreciates the curriculum requirements set forth for the Interdisciplinary Studies program for their importance in achieving the appropriate breadth and rigor in each individualized plan of study. However, the committee observes that differences between requirements of the individualized studies sequence and the multidisciplinary studies sequence are minor and may unnecessarily confuse students considering the program as well as advisors and faculty members directing students to the program. Accordingly, the committee recommends that University College explore merging those two sequences. The committee further recommends that University College, working through the Office of the Provost, re-engage College of Education administration and faculty in discussions about moving the human and educational services sequence to a program or programs within the College of Education. Such a move would allow University College to focus Interdisciplinary Studies resources on creating customized plans of study for students who intentionally seek to study a specialized discipline not otherwise taught at the University. The committee believes that removing the human and educational services sequence from the program would further simplify the structure of the Interdisciplinary Studies program and enhance its integrity. The committee notes that every teacher education initial licensure program offered by the University other than elementary education, middle level education, and special education has already developed an option within their own program to accommodate

students who do not complete initial licensure requirements. Among them is the Early Childhood Education program of the College of Education, which established a pedagogy emphasis sequence in 2017 for that purpose.

Explore consolidating Interdisciplinary Studies and University Studies. The committee observes that plans of study for the B.A., B.S. in Interdisciplinary Studies program and plans of study for the B.A., B.S. in University Studies program are similar despite differences in the profiles of students each program is intended to serve. Accordingly, the committee recommends that University College work with the Office of the Provost and the appropriate shared governance committees to explore the benefits and disadvantages of consolidating the two programs. The committee observes that consolidation would eliminate the long-standing confusion among students, faculty, staff, and external stakeholders (including employers) regarding differences between the programs. Consolidation might be particularly appropriate if the grade point average required for admission to the Interdisciplinary Studies program is changed to match the requirement applicable to University Studies students and if the human and educational service sequences of the Interdisciplinary Studies program is eliminated (see above).

Explore enhancements to the curriculum and to co-curricular opportunities. The committee commends the commitment of University College staff to students in the program and encourages staff to continue exploring curricular and co-curricular enhancements to improve their experience. With regard to adding required core courses, the committee notes two issues for University College to consider. One is the impact core course requirements may have on the flexibility students now have to customize their plan of study. The second is the likelihood of having too few students to justify offering a course dedicated to the Interdisciplinary Studies program, at least in the short term. An option might be to use or adapt one or more existing Interdisciplinary Studies courses that admit students regardless of their program affiliation (e.g., IDS 106 Career Choice). The self-study report suggests exploration of adding a capstone experience to the curriculum. The committee concurs. Asking students to complete a capstone research project or internship could enhance cohesiveness of students' experiences in the program and improve students' qualifications for employment. The committee suggests having students work through their academic mentor to arrange an appropriate experience.

Develop and implement a plan for connecting with program alumni. The committee recognizes efforts by University College to compile a database of program graduates and to develop procedures for adding students to the database as they graduate. The committee recommends that University College continue those efforts by developing and implementing a plan for systematic outreach to alumni for feedback regarding the program and for updates regarding their professional endeavors. The committee suggests that University College consider including as a component of the plan efforts to engage alumni through social media. University College might consider encouraging students to join social media sites established for program alumni when the students enroll in Interdisciplinary Studies. Through such an approach, students could be encouraged to maintain contact with University College during and after their time in the program and would have opportunities to engage with program graduates. Information gleaned from contacts with alumni, and even with current students engaged with alumni social media sites, could be used to promote the program to prospective students and to help identify gaps in the university curriculum that might be filled by newly-established plans of study.

Develop and implement a new student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program. The committee concurs with University College that development and implementation of a new student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program should be a priority for the next program review cycle, after decisions have been made regarding the program structure and curriculum. The committee recognizes the challenges facing University College in developing such a document given that the program does not have core courses or plans of study shared by multiple students. The committee recognizes that an assessment plan for the program may, consequently, focus more heavily on indirect assessment methods than do assessment plans for other academic programs. The committee recommends including strategies for documenting information regarding individualized plans of study and career paths of alumni and for communicating that information to other units at the University to inform academic program planning. The committee recommends that University College look to the Assessment Advisory Council, University Assessment Services, and comparator and aspirational programs for guidance in developing the new assessment plan.