

Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS)

Expedited Program Review:

Executive Summary 2023

Process

The Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) program was developed in 2020 to provide a pathway for students who were interested in a flexible degree program option similar to the Bachelor of Arts in Applied Studies (BAAS). The BAAS program was discontinued at LAPU. In preparation for the 2023 BIS self-review, Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) 3, 4, 5, and 6 were all assessed in 2023. PLOs 1 and 2 were assessed in 2022. All of the PLOs for the BIS program had been passed before the self-study. Dr. Brant Himes and Dr. Scott Edgar completed the PLO reviews and served on the committee for the self-study. Given the low enrollments for the program (less than 50), an expedited review was approved. The expedited review does not include external stakeholder input.

Students

The students in the BIS program come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Their goal is to create a customized program for their interests by combining multiple emphasis areas. Because of this, students are motivated to see how their work in Interdisciplinary Studies can provide a unique perspective on different workplace and ethical issues. Overall, students find value and meaning in bringing an interdisciplinary perspective to the opportunities and challenges they face in both professional and personal contexts.

Curriculum and Learning Environment

The Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) is a flexible, interdisciplinary program designed for students who want a degree tailored to their specific career goals integrating diverse coursework and culminating in a capstone project. The major offers a versatile academic track that allows students to explore various academic disciplines of study while earning a unified degree. It accommodates individuals whose career aspirations or intellectual pursuits span multiple disciplines, empowering them to craft a customized major. Emphasizing vocational exploration and skill development, this program equips graduates with leadership, analytical, and relational skills essential for the workplace. This degree serves as a foundation for both professional endeavors and future graduate studies. Some areas where graduates of an interdisciplinary studies program commonly pursue further education include: law,

public administration, social sciences, education, business administration, healthcare administration, environmental studies, international relations, media and communications, and creative arts.

The sequence of the two concentrations culminates in the two capstone courses. The two areas of concentration each focus on their distinct sphere. In the capstone courses, students have an opportunity to work on the synthesis of the two. One of the capstone courses reflects primarily on the student's character, while the other focuses on problem-solving strategies. Students can walk away with skills that will assist them in solving contemporary problems. Students also present the skills learned through the process. Problem-solving allows students to bring all their previous knowledge to application, which is important. Students are learning a strategy that they can apply in their future work. Personal development, integration, research, problem-solving, and present working across disciplines all culminate to create a sum that is more than the parts.

Student Learning and Success

The first indicator of student success is whether students achieve the program learning outcomes to the expected levels. All six PLOs achieved the established standard. In the 2023-24 academic year, fewer than 50 students enrolled in the BIS program. As a result of the small n , the percentages for the BIS program may fluctuate more dramatically than larger programs at LAPU.

A comparative analysis of student performance between the broader LAPU student population and those enrolled in the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) program revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups. While overall pass rates were nearly identical, 78.5% for BIS students and 78.6% for the general LAPU student body, it is important to contextualize these figures within the program's enrollment size. The BIS program maintains a relatively small student population, with fewer than 50 students enrolled. As a result, percentage-based variations may appear more pronounced due to the smaller sample size. Overall, these findings suggest that the BIS program effectively supports student achievement at levels comparable to other academic programs at LAPU. The program's adaptability, coupled with its appeal to students with diverse educational backgrounds, contributes to its ability to foster academic success across various demographics.

The BIS program builds on the unique gifts, talents, and abilities of students wanting to complete a customized degree program. The program provides a great deal of value for students by teaching them how to analyze different topics and disciplines (i.e. two required concentrations), synthesize them, and put them together. The program prepares students to think critically and synthesize different disciplines, which in turn prepares students to think creatively about partnering across different areas and/or disciplines to develop solutions to real-world problems.

Faculty

The faculty composition for the BIS program is inherently diverse, as it encompasses instructors from multiple academic disciplines. Faculty members teaching within the BIS program include those responsible for delivering instruction in the two core courses, *ISTU 490: Interdisciplinary Research and Writing* and *ISTU 495: Interdisciplinary Studies Capstone*, in addition to faculty members associated with the two distinct concentrations available within the program. Given this structure, quantifying a

definitive demographic profile for BIS faculty presents a significant challenge. The faculty composition varies based on students' individualized academic pathways, as each student's selected concentration determines the specific faculty members involved in their educational experience.

Program Viability and Sustainability

Enrollment trends in higher education are often influenced by projected occupational outlooks published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which provide valuable insight into the workforce demands for specific career fields. However, in the case of interdisciplinary studies, the absence of a direct career pathway linked to the degree presents a unique challenge in forecasting long-term program demand. Unlike degree programs explicitly aligned with a particular industry or professional trajectory—such as nursing, engineering, or business—the interdisciplinary studies program offers a broad and flexible educational foundation that can be applied across multiple fields.

As previously discussed, the interdisciplinary studies program serves as a niche academic offering, catering to students who seek to integrate knowledge from two distinct disciplines into a cohesive and personalized learning experience. This flexibility appeals to individuals with diverse academic interests and career aspirations, particularly those who value a multidisciplinary approach to problem-solving and critical thinking. However, the challenge in predicting enrollment growth over the next five to eight years stems from the program's adaptability, as student demand is influenced by shifting industry trends, evolving workforce expectations, and individual academic goals rather than a single occupational outlook.

Program Demand

The Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) program at LAPU is designed to be both academically flexible and financially competitive. The total number of units required for the degree and the overall cost of attainment align favorably with comparable programs at other universities. This strategic positioning makes the BIS program an attractive option within the higher education marketplace.

One of the defining characteristics of the BIS program is its unique structure, which caters to a specific student demographic. Unlike traditional degree programs that are directly aligned with a specific career path, the BIS program provides a broad, interdisciplinary education that equips students with diverse skills applicable to multiple professional fields. However, this lack of a clearly defined career trajectory may lead some prospective students to hesitate when considering enrollment.

The program tends to attract students who have accumulated many academic credits over time, often due to life circumstances such as career changes, military service, or other personal and professional experiences. These students typically seek a flexible and efficient pathway to degree completion. As a result, the BIS program is an ideal option for those with prior coursework from other institutions, offering a highly transfer-friendly structure that maximizes the applicability of previously earned credits. This emphasis on credit transferability enhances accessibility and affordability, making the BIS program a valuable option for nontraditional students looking to complete their undergraduate education.

Recommendations, Future Goals, and Planning for Improvement

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Marketing and Outreach

- Partner with the marketing team to effectively communicate the BIS program's advantages, including its focus on adaptability and lifelong learning.
- Develop targeted digital content, such as videos and social media campaigns, highlighting the program's interdisciplinary strengths.
- Showcase employer interest in BIS graduates by aligning curriculum highlights with industry needs in creativity and problem-solving.

2. Development of a BIS Learning Community

- Establish a space beyond coursework where students can collaborate and enhance their interdisciplinary learning experience.
- Provide structured support, including mentorship, networking events, and discussion forums.
- Utilize AI-driven platforms to create personalized learning pathways and real-time collaboration opportunities.

3. Curriculum Enhancement and AI Integration

- Develop educational content, including video resources, to emphasize interdisciplinary thinking and career applications.
- Split PLO 3 (written and oral communication skills) to ensure balanced assessment.
- Leverage AI tools for continuous course updates, ensuring relevance with industry trends and employer expectations.

SMART Goals

1. Increase BIS Program Enrollment by 20% in Two Years

Specific: Partner with the marketing team to enhance outreach and promote the BIS program's unique advantages.

Measurable: Track enrollment numbers and prospective student engagement through digital marketing metrics.

Achievable: Implement a structured marketing strategy, including digital content, targeted advertising, and success stories.

Relevant: A stronger enrollment pipeline ensures program sustainability and growth.

Time-bound: Achieve a 20% increase in enrollment by the end of two years.

2. Establish a BIS Learning Community and Engage 75% of Students Within One Year

Specific: Create an online community where BIS students can collaborate and access mentorship opportunities.

Measurable: Track student participation rates through attendance, engagement metrics, and feedback surveys.

Achievable: Launch a dedicated platform, facilitate networking events, and provide discussion

forums.

Relevant: Enhances interdisciplinary learning and student experience.

Time-bound: Fully operational and engaging at least 75% of BIS students within one year.

3. **Integrate AI Tools in 50% of BIS Courses Within Three Years (in addition to Spark)**

Specific: Utilize AI-driven platforms to personalize learning, provide real-time feedback, and update course content.

Measurable: Assess the percentage of courses with AI integration and gather student feedback on effectiveness.

Achievable: Leverage existing AI tools and collaborate with faculty to implement changes gradually.

Relevant: Ensures curriculum remains innovative and aligned with industry trends.

Time-bound: Implement AI in 50% of courses within three years.

These SMART goals and recommendations will enhance the BIS program's visibility, strengthen student support, and ensure alignment with evolving industry needs.