

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies (BALIBS) Program Review: Executive Summary

Process

The Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies is a degree that came to LAPU in the merger of Azusa Pacific Online University and the School of Adult and Professional Studies at Azusa Pacific University in 2014. Since that time, the program has benefitted from steady and positive enrollments. To date there have been almost 1,000 students enrolled since the time of the merger.

Many of the BALIBS students are paraeducators, working in support roles in schools. The most frequent positions reflected in this group are classroom aides who have excellent classroom experience but lack the degree and credentials required to become a licensed teacher. Earning the BALIBS degree is the first step toward teacher licensure for LIBS students.

The program requirements have been structured to prepare students to pass the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET) - Multiple Subjects. These program requirements have been in place since 2005, when CSET passage became mandatory for all prospective elementary and special education teacher candidates.

In the Fall of 2018, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) re-introduced the option for universities to offer “waiver-approved” subject matter degree programs. Students graduating from a waiver-approved program would be exempt from having to take the California Subject Examinations for Teachers (CSET). These exams are very high stakes and not amenable to most adult learners. Qualifying for waiver-approved status would be an excellent marketing tool as well. When the CTC released the new Elementary Subject Matter (ESM) Matrix that year, it became evident that the current BALIBS curriculum would need a substantial redesign. Upon reviewing the new CTC requirements, a decision to revise the BALIBS program was approved by CAPC on January 15, 2019. These revisions were submitted to WSCUC and approved as a substantive change proposal.

As a result of these recent revisions, a limited program review was approved by the CAO. This abbreviated review was completed by the assistant dean and the program development coordinator with assistance from the LAPU Institutional Research and Marketing departments. Due to the limited amount of assessment data, an external reviewer was not included in this review. The full report is linked here: [BALIBS Program Review 2019](#).

A summary of findings and recommendations are presented below.

Findings

Competitive Analysis

A labor outlook analysis and competitor analysis were performed at the outset of program development.

The labor outlook was driven by a teacher shortage in California, particularly in central California and the Inland Empire east of Los Angeles. By providing a Liberal Studies program online, LAPU can access

learners in all of California, and prepare them for teaching through completion of the BALIBS program (followed by an approved teaching credential program).

A competitor analysis of Brandman University's Liberal Studies program revealed a similar program design and course structure. Brandman's courses are all offered online, and some are offered at approximately 30 regional centers throughout California and Washington State. There are no significant differences between LAPU's and Brandman University's Liberal Studies programs, although in 2018, Brandman did offer the integrated BALIBS + multiple subject credential option, which, by integrating credential courses into the program, allowed students to receive a multiple subject teaching credential at the end of their program. This integrated credential option served as a model for future planning of the LAPU BALIBS program, in order to continue to offer program options to students that prioritize not only completion of a Liberal Studies degree, but also prepare them to receive the teaching credential that will allow them to enter the classroom as a highly qualified teacher. Completing the integrated program could allow students to enter the profession up to a full year sooner than the traditional "fifth-year" approach that has been the standard in California.

Outcomes

When the BALIBS program was redesigned in 2019, new Program Learning Outcomes were established. Only one round of annual assessment data has been collected for the revised BALIBS program. There is not enough data to effectively assess the outcomes at this time.

Retention and graduation rates

The one-year retention rate for the BALIBS program (2018) was 64%, which is higher than the average LAPU bachelor's-level program. Female students retained at a rate of 62% while male students retained at a rate of 69%. The four-year graduation rate for the 2015-16 cohort was 78% and the three-year graduation rate for the 2016-17 cohort was 61%, both of which are higher than typical LAPU bachelor's-level programs. These higher than normal retention and graduation rates may be attributable to the facts that (1) many BALIBS students enrolled at LAPU after beginning their studies at APU; and (2) the BALIBS program is more transfer-friendly than many other LAPU bachelor's programs; and (3) the BALIBS program has a solid reputation for preparing students to enter the field of elementary and special education.

Since the BALIBS program was transferred from Azusa Pacific University to University College/Los Angeles Pacific University, 656 students have graduated from the program. Of this total, 531 graduates were female while 125 were male. The race/ethnicity of graduates is as follows: Hispanic - 46%; White - 38%; Black or African American - 7%; Asian - 2%; Unknown - 5%; Two or more races - 1%. The average student transferred 77 credits into the program and, therefore, was not likely to complete the program in less than two years. Given that the ethnic mix has been changing over the life of the program, an adjusted comparison may be warranted. The graduation rates per ethnicity/race are much closer to the enrollment ethnicity/race from inception through 2018 Spring semester. Using this metric the enrollment vs graduation rates are as follows: Hispanic (44% vs. 46%), White (24% vs. 38%), Black or African-American (17% vs. 7%), Asian (7% vs. 2%), Unknown (3% vs. 5%), Two or more races (3% vs. 1%).

The enrollment rates compared to graduation rates from inception through the Q1 of AY 2018 show that women have been a little more successful than men, although the difference between enrollment and graduation rates is within three percent. Women comprised 78 percent of all BALIBS enrollments during the period and 81 percent of graduations to date, whereas men comprised 22 percent of all enrollments and 19 percent of graduations.

Preparedness for advanced study and/or careers

The BALIBS program is designed to be the first step in preparing for a career as a classroom teacher. Many current students are school paraprofessionals who assist children with special needs in a school setting, or school or school district employees in ancillary services (like food services, library services, etc). Most students seek the BALIBS degree in order to become a classroom teacher in an elementary or special education setting. The BALIBS program is an important first step, and will prepare students for the subject matter competency portion of their teaching career, as well as prepare them for the CSET, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing's subject matter examination.

An alumni survey was sent to 485 BALIBS alumni from the past five years to which 62 alumni (12.8%) responded. The survey included questions about employment and the relevance of the BALIBS program to their careers. The following observations demonstrate that the BALIBS program has prepared students well for careers and further study:

- 91.9% reported being employed full time while 46.7% reported being employed in the field of education. 8.1% reported not being employed.
- 64.5% reported that the BALIBS program had helped them advance their career or start a new one while the remainder were split between the responses of NO- 16.1% and N/A-19.3% .
- 50% reported being currently employed in the field of their studies.
- 69.3% reported that they had already or planned to enroll in a teaching credential or graduate degree program, 19.4% reported they had no such plans, and 11.2% reported they were uncertain about the pursuit of a credential or graduate degree.

Recommendations, Future Goals, and Planning for Improvement

Recommendations

Current Program Review Cycle

In light of the fact that the entire BALIBS program has recently undergone a significant revision, adequate assessment data that could inform a full Program Review is not available at this time. Program assessors (faculty) began collecting PLO data on the revised PLOs for the first cycle this past year (2020). The recommendation of the team is that the BALIBS program participate in the full program review process as determined by the EEC at a revised due date that aligns with the commencement of PLO assessment for the 2020 year.

Future goals

As a result of this program review process the following goals have been established:

1. Proceed with the plan to seek “Waiver Status” with the CTC. This will allow the program to meet CTC requirements for program content and allow successful BALIBS graduates to proceed to a credential program without having to take the CSET Multiple Subjects Exams.
2. Combine the revised LIBS program with the newly developed and approved Multiple Subjects Credential courses that provides a pathway to certification in four years versus the traditional five years.
3. As the new BALIBS courses are taught and evaluated through the Annual Assessment process, make improvements to coursework to ensure the continued alignment between course, program and university learning outcomes.

Improvement plans

In order to achieve these goals, the following steps have been taken:

- The assistant dean (Gordon Jorgenson) will continue to pursue the Subject Matter Waiver approval with the CTC. Adjunct faculty and the Education Advisory Council will assist with this effort.
- Obtain preliminary approval from the CTC for a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential that is planned for a Fall 2021 launch.
- Continue to evaluate Program Learning Outcomes as part of the Annual Assessment activities.
- As the new credential courses are taught for the first time, collaborate with faculty and eLearning to make appropriate revisions to courses.