

Bachelor of Integrated Studies
Program Review Follow-Up Report

A Presentation for WSU Faculty Senate Executive Committee
November 15, 2012

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Introduction

Weber's Bachelor of Integrated Studies Program

The Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS) program is geared for students who have high levels of personal interest in their educational experiences, self-defined learning objectives in a variety of academic disciplines, and creative interests in personalizing their college education through capstone project experiences. To serve these students, Weber's Bachelor of Integrated Studies is defined by these program outcomes:

- BIS Students will demonstrate in-depth professional knowledge in their academic-areas of study
- BIS Students will synthesize knowledge from their three academic interests into an integrated capstone project
- BIS Students will use analytic problem-solving skills beyond critical- thinking skills expected in their regular coursework through the capstone process
- BIS Students will demonstrate professional and life skills commensurate with baccalaureate education
- BIS Students will verbalize professional life-plans beyond graduation either in their particular careers or through additional graduate studies

BIS Site Visit—April 5, 2012

Major Conclusions, Part 1

- **Leadership:** BIS has benefitted by the dedication of prior director Kathy Sitzman. Reviewers noted that: “...she is passionate about the program and is dedicated and committed to its success. Perhaps most noteworthy is her commitment to the students. She places their needs and educational objectives first.” The review also noted that under Dr. Sitzman’s leadership, BIS capstone projects continued to improve and represented high-quality inquiry projects.
- **Relationship with Other Academic Departments:** BIS program outcomes cross academic disciplines and require high levels of diverse faculty support for the dissemination of policies, implementation of capstone experiences, and guidance for program improvement.
- **Faculty Support:** BIS needs to continually reach out to Weber faculty to help them clearly understand the propose and method of the capstone project experience and their roles as faculty members throughout the capstone experience.

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Major Conclusions, Part 2

- ***Advising and Student Services:*** BIS maintains an excellent rapport with Weber's *Community Involvement Center (CIC)*. Many BIS students coordinate their capstone projects with service learning and community involvement partners.
- ***Student Advising:*** Advising is a most important component of the BIS program. Careful attention must be placed in meeting with potential BIS students, discussing their interests, and assessing the fit between students' goals and BIS program objectives.
- ***Administrative Support:*** University administration has been very supportive of the BIS program. To the extent possible, sufficient physical and financial resources have been given to the program to support its mission and growth.
- ***Program Assessments.*** BIS program outcome assessments have been skillfully built into the degree. Based on BIS program outcomes, capstone projects are reviewed according to an articulated rubric that is used to evaluate each capstone project.

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Recommendations 1-3

- 1. BIS students need to be continually provided with venues where their work can be celebrated, highlighted, and recognized beyond the project defense.** *Response:* BIS Program Director, Dr. Michael Cena, will organize BIS poster sessions at the conclusion of Fall and Spring Semesters that are designed to both celebrate the work being done in capstone projects and as a means of recruitment for potential BIS students. BIS has added links to its website for examples of outstanding capstone projects (former students have given their permission for us to do this).
- 2. BIS projects are usually spiral bound. Evaluators recommend projects be bound with hard covers, similar to a masters thesis.** *Response:* BIS will (with participants' permission) continue to post examples of outstanding capstone projects on its website. BIS students will be given the option of using either soft or hard cover binding. The BIS advisory office will place copies of outstanding capstone projects in its office and use them in student advisement.
- 3. WSU should support faculty with load reductions rather than simply buying participating faculty a book.** *Response:* Ideally, a .25 credit hour load buy-out should be policy across campus for faculty who participate on BIS capstone committee. This is a university-wide issue that will need to be addressed by the WSU central administration. Faculty Senate support with this policy would be greatly appreciated.

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Recommendations 4 & 5

- 4. It may be helpful to add a third course that expands on the theory and practice of interdisciplinary thought.** *Response:* Currently, BIS is working with interested academic departments to create opportunities for integrated studies in various general education disciplines that cross traditional academic disciplines (e.g. physics and psychology, mathematics and literature). Although in infancy, these discussion may lead to greater integration through students' general education experiences than simply adding another BIS class dealing with the *theory* of integrated studies.
- 5. An association of institutions throughout the Utah Systems of Higher Education could develop a system-wide network to help facilitate common goals and objectives.** *Response:* Also noted in this section was the need for Weber to “reach out to colleagues and campuses across the state and begin a formal dialogue about the potential of inter-campus collaborations.” At this time, Dr. Cena has entered into a tentative agreement with Snow College to bring a 2+2 model for a cohort of BIS students at Snow beginning Fall 2013. Essentially, Snow students would earn their associates degrees at Snow and then complete Weber’s BIS degree through on-line, face-to-face, and hybrid class models. This would provide many Central Utah students with exposure to Weber State and add student enrollments to our on-line course offerings. Dr. Cena is exploring contacting others interested in integrated studies to create a state-wide Interdisciplinary Studies Council.

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Recommendations 6 & 7

- 6. Formal faculty orientation about the BIS program is warranted.** *Response:* BIS team members, Michael Cena and Marie Clayton, have arranged with Associate Provost Ryan Thomas, to meet with each college's department chairs and deans to familiarize them with BIS, to disseminate program information, and to invite new faculty into the BIS experience.
- 7. There is a lack of support from Weber's career services for BIS majors.** *Response:* This remains a major goal for Dr. Cena's first semester as BIS director, strengthening BIS career service agreements to: (a) identify a career service specialist who will be assigned to serve BIS students, (b) assist BIS students in preparing employment resources as they begin their job searches, and (c) collect employment data from those who hire BIS students for continued program growth and improvement.