

**WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS)  
5-Year Site Visit Report and Action Plans  
Academic Year: 2016-2017

**Brief Introductory Statement**

The Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS) is an interdisciplinary degree housed in the Weber State University Office of Academic Affairs. The BIS degree is designed to engage students in ownership of their educational experiences through personalized academic paths. Embedded in the degree are three academic emphases, faculty mentoring, creativity/research skills, and personal signature work through capstone projects. BIS students:

- Create a personalized academic program with discipline-specific advisors from over 50 departments in the arts and sciences
- Build upon the broad base of knowledge learned through breadth and depth general education coursework and projects
- Identify and work with three academic faculty representing the student's academic disciplines
- Demonstrate high impact practices such as: (a) collaborative assignments and projects, (b) undergraduate research, (c) diversity/global learning, (d) community engaged learning, (e) internships, (f) creative expression, and (g) capstone courses and projects.

Repko (2015) defined *integrated studies* as a process of answering questions, problem solving, and using inquiry to investigate issues too broad or complex to be addressed by a single discipline. Students must integrate and meld content knowledge, methodology, high impact practices, and problem-solving skills to complete their degrees.

Bachelor of Integrated Studies students select three academic emphases for in-depth study and work closely with University faculty to conceptualize, draft, and create signature Capstone Projects that meld and synthesize knowledge, methods, and creativity into a cohesive whole.

Repko, A. (2015). *Interdisciplinary research process and theory*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

*The mission of the BIS Department to is recruit, advise, and support students as they identify three academic areas of study; facilitate communications between students and mentoring faculty; and to prepare students to craft high impact inquiry, creative, or community-engaged learning Capstone Projects.*

**Areas where the program did not meet the Standards and why:**

The review committee did not find any areas that did meet the outlined Standards.

**Progress Reported from the 2011-2012 Five-Year Review:**

1. The BIS Department has implemented the suggestion that alternative means be used to share Capstone projects—in addition to placing them in the library. Most Capstone projects are now scanned, categorized, and placed on the Departments website: [weber.edu/BIS](http://weber.edu/BIS) under categories of: (a) primary research, (b) secondary research, (c) community-engaged service learning, and (e) creative project.
2. A BIS Advisory Council has been formed and issues, suggestions, and policies have been shared with council member for feedback before implementation or policy change. The re-structuring of the role of Weber's Associate Provost for High Impact Programs and Faculty Development has helped strengthen campus links and understandings for the BIS Program.
3. A powerful resource has been created between BIS and WSU Career Services with a career service seminar being included in BIS 3800. It has been taught the last four years by Pat Wheeler. With Ms. Wheeler's retirement, BIS and Career Services have worked to identify Amelia Williams as her successor. Ms. Williams has sat on several BIS committees representing American Sign Language and is familiar with the BIS program and Capstone requirements.
4. BIS 2800 Theories of Integrated Learning (3) has been developed with an eye toward on-going campus-wide rethinking of general education. There is potential for implementing this class as part of an effort to conceptualize undergraduate methodology requirements.

**Major Commendations from the Site Visit Team—January 31, 2017:**

1. The BIS's program, mission, and outcomes are congruent with Weber State University's mission and values. The program incorporates national trends in interdisciplinary work, research, and values into its mission.
2. The BIS program has tremendous support at all levels at Weber State University. Evaluators felt there was a strong sense of mission and good chemistry between all interested parties—faculty, staff, administration, advisors, and students. The Department's outreach to special populations was commendable and should be noted. And, it was commended for having a broad-based advisor council.
3. BIS participating faculty valued the capstone experience and working with students. The University supported such efforts with gift cards or payroll deposits as a reward for faculty service and mentoring.

4. The evaluators observed that student performance data have been successfully, and consistently, used for program improvement. A meaningful 80% threshold benchmark for six BIS Capstone Rubric indicators had been established. These six indicators had been based on American Association of Colleges and University's LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) 2010/2015 Standards. Reviewers noted that the BIS Department made informed responses and interventions over the last five years for when the 80% threshold was not met.
5. The evaluators noted that collaborations between HIP (High Impact Programs) directors and associated programs at Weber was an excellent idea, and that such collaborations can be of great benefit for Weber and our students.
6. BIS students loved tailoring their university experience via a BIS degree. The Department used a variety of means to publicize the program and degree. Interviewed BIS students all had different ways they heard about a BIS degree—the most common being word of mouth.
7. The BIS website was very useful and user-friendly to advise, support, and recruit students.

#### **Recommendations from the Site Visit Team—January 31, 2017:**

1. The BIS program would benefit from additional marketing and branding efforts **[MARKETING/BRANDING]**.
2. BIS participants heard about the program through various channels, however effort could be made to disseminate more information through a variety of channels about BIS **[INFORMATION]**.
3. BIS faculty members participated because of intrinsic rewards. Although this was commendable, the University should develop faculty incentives such as overload, pay-per-student committee, buy out of teaching load, or other institutional structures to support faculty and reinforce the value of working on BIS committees **[COMPENSATION]**.
4. The BIS Department should continue to “professionalize” the faculty/student mentoring experience through professional training (such as a Canvas course). Although the Capstone Rubric provided guidance and consistency for capstone evaluation, additional faculty committee training could be beneficial for mentoring students. **[MENTORING]**.
5. BIS students may benefit from more precise capstone structures (such as peer support networks) and assignment benchmarks in BIS 4800. These could help insure greater uniformity for student/faculty expectations **[BIS 4800 STRUCTURES]**
6. Departments offering BIS emphases may find it helpful to have: (a) an introduction to the discipline, (b) content methodology, and (c) integrated studies philosophy at the beginning of BIS programs of study **[DISCIPLINE METHODS]**.

**BIS Action Plans to Implement Feedback from the January 31, 2017 Site Visit Team Recommendations**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>AY 2017-2018</b>	<b>AY 2018-2019</b>	<b>AY 2019-2020</b>
<b>Marketing/Branding</b>	<p>There is on-going discussion with faculty in business and marketing to help with these issues. Inquiry is being made to identify and secure WSU resources—already in place—to re-market, re-brand the BIS degree as 3 on 1 “Three Professors for One Student” during the Capstone Project. This is a change from the former marketing concept of “Select Your Degree Options”</p>	<p>A major effort this year will be spent identifying and developing concepts around re-marketing/re-branding.</p> <p>A variety of concepts will be shared with the BIS Advisory Council for their feedback and input.</p> <p>WSU Administration has secured extra funding to help with re-marketing/re-branding efforts.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that concepts from last year will be fully developed and ready to disseminate this academic year.</p> <p>Pilot data will be collected regarding the Department’s efforts.</p>
<b>Information</b>	<p>Ways of disseminating BIS program mission, concept, and recruitment will be explored.</p> <p>Suggestions will be shared with the BIS Advisory Council for their feedback and recommendations.</p>	<p>Initial information dissemination ideas will be piloted and revised.</p> <p>Pilot data will be collected regarding the Department’s efforts.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that information sharing strategies will be fully implemented this academic year.</p>

<p><b>Mentoring</b></p>	<p>The suggestion of developing a Canvas-based class for faculty mentors will be presented and discussed at two BIS Advisory Council meetings. Suggestions for implementation will be conceptualized with action plans for this recommendation.</p>	<p>Based upon feedback from the BIS Advisor Council, BIS Director Mike Cena will work with WSU on-line to develop course mentoring content and course instructional delivery methods.</p>	<p>It is anticipated that mentoring training developed from last year's efforts will be fully developed and will go live this year.</p> <p>Pilot data will be collected regarding the Department's efforts.</p>
<p><b>BIS 4800 Structures</b></p>	<p>Immediately, benchmark structures for BIS 4800 are going live Summer 2017. Benchmark dates are set for: (a) calling a proposal meeting with all three mentoring faculty, (b) having a signed project proposal meeting with all three faculty, (c) providing the BIS Director with evidence the student has been meeting and soliciting feedback from BIS committee members, and (d) defining a date by which Capstone defenses must be scheduled.</p>	<p>Pilot data and student feedback will be collected regarding the Department's efforts.</p> <p>Possible changes for dates or benchmark requirements will be modified based on pilot data and student feedback.</p>	<p>Full implementation for Benchmark structures in place.</p>

### **BIS Site Visitation Team Recommendations Requiring Long-Term Discussions:**

1. BIS faculty members participate because of intrinsic rewards. Although this is commendable, the University should develop faculty incentives such as overload, pay per student committee, buy out of teaching load, or other institutional structures to support faculty and reinforce the value of working on BIS committees [**COMPENSATION**]

*Response:* This has been an on-going concern of site visitation teams—the type of support content faculty have as they work with BIS students on Capstone committee. Currently, WSU administration has secured \$50 gift cards for the first BIS committee service per calendar year; and a PAR action resulting in \$50 plus benefits and taxes for faculty serving on two or more committees each calendar year. Currently, the BIS Department does not have options to change this policy. However, the BIS Director will share this observation with WSU administration.

2. Departments offering BIS emphases may find it helpful to have an introduction to the discipline, methodology, and integrated studies philosophy at the beginning of BIS programs of study [**DISCIPLINE METHODS**]

*Response:* WSU academic department participating in BIS define their BIS subject-area emphases based on best theories and practices from each academic discipline. The BIS Director is continually sharing this recommendation with Weber's academic departments to suggest possible changes for BIS content emphases to include a methods course used by that emphasis to meet this suggestion.