

UTC Department of Integrated Studies
External Review
Maria F. Loffredo Roca, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Integrated Studies, Florida Gulf Coast University

INTRODUCTION

I visited the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to conduct the external review of the Bachelor of Integrated Studies program from March 20th to 22nd 2019. The BIS is a rigorous degree program housed in the College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies (CHEPS). The program requires a student to apply for admission. The application requires a student to provide a narrative justification for their desire to major in Integrated Studies along with a fully articulated Course Plan. Students combine 2 to 3 different disciplines completing an average of 24 credits in each discipline, along with the INTS 4900, Integrated Studies Senior Portfolio course. As a result, most individual student degree plans require a minimum of 51 credits to complete the Integrated Studies major. The program is currently under the exceptional leadership of Dr. Gretchen Potts who has a 50% assignment for this position. Dr. Potts continues to also serve the Department of Chemistry for 50% of her load.

PART 1 – LEARNING OUTCOMES

Ranking of Program in Relation to Similar Programs

As offered, the BIS at UTC is a very rigorous program that rates well in relation to similar programs. It is significantly more selective than other Integrated Studies programs, requiring students to apply and be admitted to the program. This process adds rigor to the program; however, it also limits the program to a small enrollment (currently at 38 declared majors). This number has decreased in the last year by about 25%. As a result, the current structure of the BIS degree is similar to many Honors programs at peer institutions where student create individualized degree plans. If the intent of the program is to provide a degree completion option, then it does not rank as highly. However, if it is intended to be a highly selective program designed for students with a clear vision of disciplinary perspectives they would like to integrate, then it rates in the top tier of programs of this nature.

Clarity of Program and Learning Outcomes

The BIS program identifies 5 program learning goals and outcomes. These are clearly stated in their documents and are used for program assessment. These goals are:

1. Communicate – express a position verbally and in writing, with consideration for intent and audience.
2. Think reflectively – reflect on integrated learning and experiences in terms of theoretical and applied knowledge.
3. Solve problems – develop hypotheses, structure framework, and analyze to problem-solve,

4. Collaborate – collaborate through measurable experiential learning opportunities.
5. Integrate Learning – connect learning across two or three disciplines, both theoretically and applied.

These goals are thoughtful and appropriate for an Integrated Studies degree program, particularly a program as rigorous as the UTC BIS.

The one concern that arose during my visit was identified when meeting with current students who could not articulate the program learning goals when asked about them. When I shared the list with them, they indicated that these were discussed in the INTS 4900 course, but that they were not aware of them when entering the program. They felt that greater awareness of these program outcomes might have helped them prepare better for their Senior Portfolio experience.

Though the BIS has clearly stated learning goals and outcomes for the program itself, it does not have a fully articulated mission and vision statement for Integrated Studies. The creation of a mission and vision statement can help guide the program in the creation of a five-year plan.

Curriculum

Currently, the Integrated Studies program has limited curriculum of its own. The only INTS course required of all students is INTS 4900, Integrated Studies Senior Portfolio. The students in the program might benefit from a course that brings them together as a community earlier in their program. This would give the faculty in the program an opportunity to share the Program Learning Outcomes earlier in the students' academic program and could help students prepare better for their culminating portfolio experience.

Program Assessment

The BIS program uses the Senior Portfolio to assess student achievement of the program outcomes. Portfolios are evaluated by the instructor of the INTS 4900 course using an internally designed rubric that was based on appropriate VALUE rubrics. In 2017-2018, the program assessed three of its Learning Outcomes: Writing/Communication, Reflection, and Integration. Sample sizes were small giving the program limited information for comparison of growth. As the program moves forward, continued assessment data will help Integrated Studies have greater insight into the overall success of its students. The faculty in Integrated Studies are genuinely committed to using assessment data to improve the delivery of the INTS 4900 course. Changes have already been made to the elements of the course to help improve students' successful achievement of the learning outcomes.

In the future, I encourage the Integrated Studies program to consider having a team of 3 reviewers who are not instructors in the INTS 4900 course to assist with program review. This will add a level of objectivity to the review of the artifacts. Reviewers

should be qualified faculty from other programs at UTC, and they should review the portfolios with student names removed to help provide greater objectivity.

PART 2 – CURRICULUM

Discussion of the curriculum of the BIS program is a bit challenging since each student combines courses from other disciplines to construct his or her own degree program. The one course all students in the BIS are required to take is the INTS 4900, Integrated Studies Senior Portfolio course. The program has established Curriculum Agreements with programs across the UTC campus that give students a specific set of courses they will need to select from if pursuing the BIS degree. These Curriculum Agreements are rigorous, and in several cases are only a few credits short of pursuing the full major in the discipline. As a result, the curriculum appears to be appropriate to the level and purpose of the BIS program. It is definitely adequate to enable students to develop necessary skills and mastery of the disciplines they may choose from in creating their own Curriculum Plan.

Curriculum Agreements are modified as changes in the specific disciplines are made or as individual issues become apparent in students' ability to satisfy the requirements of each discipline. The BIS Program Director also requests individual course substitutions when a student needs specific courses that are unavailable.

Individual students are deeply involved in the development of their own individual course of study, but do not play much of a role in the general process of reviewing curriculum.

The program offers its one required course every Fall and Spring semester. They are open to offering a section in the summer if there is sufficient demand.

Based on student feedback on the INTS 4900 course, BIS has already revised the course from a 1 credit offering to a 3-credit course to better reflect the workload expected of students. This has passed through curriculum team and will be implemented in the Fall 2019 semester.

As previously suggested, it might be helpful to students in the BIS program to have one more Integrated Studies course early in the program to introduce them to the program expectations as well as to help develop a sense of community among the students.

PART 3 – STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As part of the INTS 4900 course, students are asked to write a reflection evaluating their experience in the BIS program. The faculty review the information provided in these reflections and use it to improve the INTS 4900 course.

It is difficult to collect student feedback at other points in the BIS program because students are spread out in courses in many different disciplines. There is no other place in the curriculum other than INTS 4900 where student feedback is readily available and easily collectible.

The BIS program itself does not offer specific extracurricular activities, however, UTC has many student organizations that BIS students can participate in and that will help expose them to diversity.

BIS students have full access to UTC's academic support services. The program does not offer academic support services exclusively to the BIS students. It would be difficult to offer these resources exclusive to the program since student program plans are unique to each individual.

PART 4 – FACULTY

Dr. Gretchen Potts and Dr. John Harbison are the two faculty members teaching sections of the INTS 4900 course for the BIS program. Both are exceptionally well qualified and meet SACSCOC qualifications. Both of their training and experience correspond with the needs of the course and of the program.

The faculty are adequate for the current program needs, however, there are needs for additional faculty if the program is to grow or to expand its offerings. At this time, the program only needs to offer one section of the INTS 4900 course per semester. If the number of majors grows, even as the program is currently designed, additional faculty resources would be needed to deliver additional sections of INTS 4900. If the program were to add additional required courses to the BIS program, this would also increase faculty needs. These needs could be met by hiring additional faculty dedicated to the Integrated Studies program or by utilizing faculty members from other Departments on campus with qualifications appropriate to teaching Integrated Studies courses.

The BIS program uses the standard UTC faculty evaluation system. Dr. Potts is the only dedicated member of the faculty, and her BIS commitment is only 50% of her workload. She is evaluated both by the College of Health, Education, and Professional Studies (for Integrated Studies), as well as by the College of Arts & Sciences (for Chemistry). Dr. Potts is a very productive scholar and an engaged member of the UTC community.

PART 5 – LEARNING RESOURCES

Due to the nature of the Integrated Studies program, it has very limited equipment and facilities needs. Students take most of their courses in other Departments and have full access to the resources offered by each of these individual programs. Office space is adequate for the program in its current iteration. Future equipment and facility needs will be based on the growth of the program.

BIS students have access to UTC's library holdings which appear to be adequate for current student needs. The UTC library is very impressive, and the BIS students appear to be well-served by both its staff and its holdings.

PART 6 – SUPPORT

In its current iteration, the BIS program appears to have sufficient resources to deliver the program. It has office space for its Director and for its support staff. The program has an operating budget for supplies.

However, if the program intends to grow, then it could use a budget for promotional materials and will also need additional faculty and staff resources to manage higher enrollments. This growth would help the program be more responsive to local, state, regional and national needs for an Integrated Studies degree completion program targeted at adult learners.

PART 7 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My overall impressions of the BIS program at UTC fall in two categories. The first are my observations about, and recommendations for the program as it is currently being offered. The second are recommendations based on the intent of the program moving forward and its ability to grow and respond to local, state, regional and national needs.

Current Program Impressions

The current design and delivery of the BIS program at UTC is that of a strong, rigorous, well-managed program. It is very demanding, requiring students to complete a total of 51 credits in a minimum of two different disciplines. Dr. Potts is doing an excellent job shepherding students through this program and graduates are securing good jobs as well as placement in graduate programs. In general, students who are currently enrolled and who have graduated from the program report high levels of satisfaction with their experience.

A concern is the dropping enrollment in the program. Current active declared majors (38) are down by approximately 25% from last year. I believe there are two main reasons for this reduction in enrollment. The first may reflect the need for a more assertive marketing campaign. Though Departments appear to be aware of the program, it appears that many current and prospective students do not know about the BIS program as an option. The second reason may be the application process and the demands of the program. As it is currently designed, the BIS program requires an application to be admitted (students cannot just declare the major), and they have to create a personal curriculum plan and rationale for pursuing the BIS. Students drawn to this program have to be highly motivated and have a clear vision of the disciplines they are interested in studying. As a result, the current BIS program has the flavor of an Honors program more than a degree completion program. This is not meant to be a criticism, but rather an observation. If the intent of the program is to provide this type of rigorous degree option for a small number of motivated students, then it is succeeding. If, however, the intent is to provide a degree completion option for a broader range of students, then the program may want to consider some changes. I will address these changes in my recommendations for future growth.

One other issue raised by current students and graduates is a lack of community among the BIS students. BIS students do not enroll in a course together until their final semester. As a result, they report missing having other students in their program to communicate with as they make their way through the program. This also causes students to lose sight of the Program Learning Outcomes which makes completing the Senior Portfolio more challenging. There are a number of formal and informal ways the program could address this need.

Current Program Recommendations

1. Create strategies to continually remind students of the Program Learning Outcomes throughout their studies to prepare them better for the Senior Portfolio experience. This may take the form of an email message to all students enrolled each semester that articulates the Program Learning Outcomes and reminds students to collect artifacts they will need to create their Senior Portfolio in their final semester.
2. To create a stronger sense of community, the program could host a meeting each semester that includes both a brief formal presentation and an opportunity for students to socialize. Students might be encouraged to find another student in the program who shares a similar curriculum plan and career interests that could serve as an academic companion as they work their way through the BIS.
3. Another option for creating community, but that would require additional resources, would be the addition of an introductory INTS course to the major. This could be a credit or non-credit experience that introduces students more formally to the Program Learning Outcomes, prepares students to progress through the program, and helps students understand the need to collect materials they will require to successfully complete the Senior Portfolio.
4. As part of the continuous improvement assessment process of the current program, I recommend the creation of an assessment team to assist in program review. At this time, program assessment is primarily completed by the instructor of the INTS 4900 course. The Senior Portfolio is the source of the artifacts used for program assessment. It would be helpful to create a team of 3 impartial reviewers who would bring a greater level of objectivity to the review process along with additional ideas for program improvement.
5. To increase awareness of the BIS program, I believe the staff should develop additional marketing materials and a marketing campaign to help with strategic recruitment. This would also require additional resources from UTC.
6. Students and graduates mentioned some scheduling challenges due to both work and family demands. They reported that it would be helpful to have more options for alternative course delivery models that might

include: 8-week hybrid sessions, additional evening offerings, Saturday morning classes, and more online options.

7. Some students reported having difficulty getting into classes they need in other programs because students in the discipline are given registration preference. I would recommend working with Departments to hold several seats in high demand courses for BIS majors. This would help students stay on track for their anticipated graduation date and would reduce the need for program substitutions.
8. Students reported some frustration and dissatisfaction with advising for the program. It appears the program advisor needs to be better versed in issues such as how a student secures PLA credit (Prior Learning Assessment), requirements in programs in BIS curriculum plans, and greater knowledge of where students may need to go on campus to solve problems or to get questions answered. This might be solved by providing additional training and professional development opportunities to the current BIS program advisor.
9. One obstacle reported by several students was funding. At this time, there are no dedicated scholarship funds for the BIS program. The program might be able increase current enrollment by offering several Integrated Studies scholarships. I recommend the BIS Director meet with UTC Advancement staff to establish an Integrated Studies scholarship fund.

Future Program Impressions

It appears that the original rationale for the creation of the BIS program at UTC was for a degree completion option for students who had already accumulated a significant number of credits or who were returning adult learners. As the BIS major evolved, it appears to have lost sight of this original intention and approximates a program where a student is pursuing almost the equivalent of a double or triple major. This design will most likely not attract many of the students for who the program was originally intended. If the administration would like to return to the original intent and help the BIS program evolve to serve a larger number of students both on campus and from the local community, it may want to consider making some significant changes.

Future Program Recommendations

1. In conjunction with the UTC administration, articulate a clear vision and mission statement that will help guide the program in the development of a five-year plan. This mission and vision should include the target audience in its development. This audience should include veterans, other adults in need of degree completion, and other appropriate populations identified by UTC.
2. Develop a clear five-year plan that includes curriculum changes, marketing and recruitment plans, and a realistic budget for achieving this plan. The plan might include adapting the design of the current program, or it might consider creating

a separate degree completion option that might be called General Studies or Liberal Studies. This could allow UTC to maintain its current rigorous program while also providing an option for more returning students or adult learners.

3. Explore partnering with large local employers. My understanding is that the state of Tennessee has articulated goals to increase the number of people in the state with degrees in higher education. The UTC is well-situated to work with some of its local large employers to bring the BIS program to them to assist their staff in completing bachelor's degrees.
4. If the program is to grow, it is important to shift the current Director assignment from half-time to a full-time appointment.
5. If UTC commits to expanding the BIS program and to serve a larger number of non-traditional students, it should restore the Adult Services Center.
6. Consider the development of a fully online degree completion program for students with life demands that make it difficult or impossible to come to campus.
7. If growth is an imperative, the University will have to dedicate faculty resources to this program. A core of dedicated Integrated Studies faculty that bring diverse perspectives to the program will be important to support growth.

If UTC is willing to commit resources to the growth of the BIS program, or a new iteration of the program, it is uniquely positioned to serve a large number of currently under-served individuals. Gretchen Potts has been a strong leader for this program and has the potential to take the program to new heights into the future. With the support of UTC's administration, the Integrated Studies program has the potential to provide a great service to the Chattanooga area and to the state of Tennessee.