

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS FORMS**

**Institutional Program Review  
Report to the Board of Regents**

Use this form to submit a program review report to the system Chief Academic Officer. Complete this form for all units/programs undergoing an accreditation review, nationally recognized review process, or institutional program review. The report is due 30 days following receipt of the external and internal review reports.

<b>UNIVERSITY:</b>	BHSU
<b>DEPARTMENT OR SCHOOL:</b>	Arts & Humanities
<b>PROGRAM REVIEWED:</b>	General Studies
<b>DATE OF REVIEW:</b>	2/1/2017
<b>TYPE OF REVIEW:</b>	Institutional Program Review

**University Approval**

*To the Board of Regents and the Executive Director: I certify that I have read this report, that I believe it to be accurate, and that it has been evaluated and approved as provided by university policy.*

 \_\_\_\_\_ 9/22/2017  
President of the University Date

1. **Identify the program reviewers and any external accrediting body:**  
Dr. Deborah Bridges, Director of General Studies, University of Nebraska at Kearney
2. **Items A & B should address the following issues: mission centrality, program quality, cost, program productivity, plans for the future, and assessment of progress.**

**2(A). Describe the strengths and weaknesses identified by the reviewers**

*Program Strengths:*

- 1) The program's interdisciplinary nature promotes critical thinking and problem-solving among majors.
- 2) The program's individualized curriculum design allows majors to take ownership of their educational experience while developing specific career skills.
- 3) The program's foundation in general education promotes lifelong learning and prepares students for coursework in their selected emphasis areas.

*Program Weaknesses:*

- 1) The program's organizational structure is unclear, in terms of who is responsible for curricular revision and assessment.
- 2) The program's individualized curriculum design results in a degree that appears less structured and cohesive, making it difficult to assess whether it is consistent in terms of the educational experiences and academic rigor required of majors.

- 3) The program's interdisciplinary nature can result in a perception that the program lacks academic rigor and/or is a degree of last resort.
- 4) The program's budget is insufficient to continue growing the major.

**2(B). Briefly summarize the review recommendations**

- 1) Develop and implement a regular assessment plan for the program (both the associate's and bachelor's degrees). The Learning Enhancement and Assessment Program (LEAP) reports should be used, along with a standardized assessment of student learning to replace the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) exam. The capstone course also affords the opportunity for regular program assessment.
- 2) A capstone-type course should be added to the Associate's Degree program requirements. This course could serve as an "introductory" course for the Bachelor's Degree program. This course would bring both consistency and cohesiveness to the program, and offer an additional program assessment tool.
- 3) Develop and implement a survey to track program graduates in terms of the types of jobs that they are able to secure with the degree. This survey could be used both upon graduation and again 3-5 years afterward.
- 4) Increase the program's budget. The major is experiencing considerable growth, especially in the bachelor's degree program. More resources will be needed to foster continued growth; particularly in relation to adding an additional course, implementing regular program assessments, tracking graduates, and marketing the major.

**2(C). Indicate the present and continuous actions to be taken by the college or department to address the issues raised by the review. What outcomes are anticipated as a result of these actions?**

This is the BHSU General Studies major's first seven-year program review. In that time, the B.GS has grown to be the eighth-most popular bachelor's degree and the AA.GS has become the second-most popular associate's degree offered at BHSU (2016-2017 IPEDS data). This program is clearly popular, but it is also experiencing some growing pains.

The external reviewer was selected because she is the Director of General Studies at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, an institution of similar size and mission to BHSU. Her insights about improving our program seem both reasonable and feasible.

A common theme in Dr. Bridges' comments is that BHSU's General Studies program is a diamond in the rough. She suggests that the University might not properly value the program, because it currently lacks a clear mission statement, sufficient administrative oversight, and adequate funding.

Therefore, a necessary first step is to determine whether/how the General Studies fits into the University's goals. Is the program contributing to those goals? Or should students be placed in more traditional majors? If BHSU feels that the General Studies program should continue, then it should develop a clear mission statement and learning goals for the program. This will help it to grow.

Second, the program needs more formal oversight. The Dean of Liberal Arts currently serves as the General Studies director, but the reviewer feels that the Dean likely has too

many additional responsibilities to manage the program alone. Therefore, the Dean should either designate a separate program director and/or a faculty oversight committee for the program. The director/committee would be responsible for assuring program quality in terms of curriculum, assessment, and student advising.

Third, the program's mission statement needs to be clarified and explicitly linked to the University's mission statement. Its learning outcomes need to be made more explicit and measurable. These outcomes should be developed by faculty representing each of the nine emphasis areas within General Studies. The faculty oversight committee described above is one method for revising the learning goals. A second option would be to give BHSU's General Education committee oversight of the General Studies program, depending on the committee's existing workload.

Fourth, the General Studies director/committee must develop and implement annual program assessments. These should include the Learning Enhancement and Assessment Program (LEAP) report required of all other majors. This would improve the academic rigor of the program, and its perception as a major of equal status. The university's forthcoming replacement for the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) exam is another option.

Fifth, a capstone-type course should be added to the AA.GS program requirements. This course would also serve as an "introductory" course for the B.GS program for students who enter after completing their general education requirements (or another degree). Both the introductory and capstone courses should offer additional program assessments, including a career-tracking survey for graduating seniors.

Sixth, some thought should be given to hiring a regular instructor (or tenure-track faculty member) to teach General Studies courses. Doing so would improve the consistency of course offerings across semesters and demonstrate the university's commitment to the program. This person could also serve as the Director of General Studies, if BHSU decides that a permanent director is preferable to an oversight committee.

Seventh, the AA.GS should be better marketed to students, particularly to those who may be considering a bachelor's degree in a program that BHSU does not offer. The B.GS should also be better marketed to Rapid City area residents, many of whom have some college education but have not yet completed a degree.

Implementing each of the above recommendations should improve both the rigor and the cohesiveness of BHSU's General Studies program, which should attract even more students to the major.

Report of the External Evaluator  
for the  
Documentary Review of the General Studies Program at  
Black Hills State University

Prepared by:

Dr. Deborah Bridges  
Director of General Studies  
University of Nebraska at Kearney  
Kearney, Nebraska

Submitted April 4, 2017

The following report is a review of the “Self-Study Report 2017” for the General Studies Program in fulfillment of the South Dakota Board of Regents requirement of a documentary review for the General Studies Program at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, SD. As instructed, the review focused only on the document provided by Mr. Scott Clarke; the review did not include a campus visit or interviews with General Studies Program personnel. Thus, the Reviewer’s comments and recommendations presented in this report are limited in scope to the information contained in the document reviewed and should be interpreted as such.

As requested, this Reviewer’s report follows the “Guidelines for Written Report Prepared by External Evaluators” provided by Mr. Scott Clarke. Recognizing the important role that program review plays in continuous improvement, every effort has been made to provide recommendations that are useful and practical for BHSU’s General Studies program.

## I. Introduction/Overview

The Self-Study report was prepared according to the Institutional Program Review Guidelines (Appendix C); the report was complete, detailed, and easy to follow. The Self-Study report clearly stated that BHSU offers both an Associate’s and Bachelor’s degree in General Studies; however, much of the discussion – for example, the capstone course, faculty, and the future plans for the program - focused primarily on the Bachelor’s degree. The discussion provided the Reviewer with a good sense of what is expected of students pursuing a General Studies degree at BHSU, the number of students currently in the program(s), and the desired future direction of the program. The document provided evidence that the program is based on, and consistent with, its mission and is aligned with BHSU’s mission. Further, the report was submitted to the Reviewer on-time and according to schedule.

## II. Program Evaluation

### A. Mission Centrality

The Self-Study report includes the program’s mission statement in two places – on the title page and on page 4 – and both are worded differently. One version emphasizes “*the option to create a degree that best meets the student’s educational needs and career goals;*” the other emphasizes the “*interdisciplinary nature of the program.*” The Reviewer was unable to locate the program’s mission statement on BHSU’s website and/or how stakeholders are made aware of the program’s mission statement.

While the mission statements of both the program and BHSU are provided, the linkages between the two are not explicitly identified. Given its interdisciplinary nature, the reasonable expectation is that the program supports the institution’s mission. Developing and stating the linkages between mission statements would provide guidance for future direction of the program. In addition, deliberate alignment of the program’s mission with that of the institution would yield benefits from both a marketing standpoint and in obtaining resources.

The Self-Study report clearly identifies the popularity of the General Studies degree program; popularity that could be translated into areas of growth. While it is true that the interdisciplinary nature of the program makes it difficult to identify labor projections,

tracking of graduates – both Associate’s and Bachelor’s - would yield insight into the types of jobs graduates are obtaining. While it is important to identify initial job placements, it is also important to track graduate’s job progression (e.g., promotions, etc.) and how their experiences in the program facilitated that progression. This in turn, provides the program with a valuable recruiting tool and a possible avenue for obtaining resources. One strategy to begin tracking graduates is to implement a graduating senior survey that collects both contact and employment information; periodic surveys (e.g., every 3 or 5 years) of former students can be used to keep up with alumni.

Another means of developing labor market projections is to identify the education level required for entry-level positions in the major employment sectors within the state. This would provide the program with areas to focus on in terms of recruitment as well as identifying what the needs of the institution’s stake-holders are.

The Self-Study provides a detailed overview of the degree requirements, in terms of credit hours, and lists the student learning outcomes for the program. While the experiential learning, globalization, and English learning outcomes are well developed and measurable; the list of goals or objectives for the General Studies Program Measurable Learner Outcomes (page 6) seem less complete. (There is some confusion regarding which learning outcomes are specifically associated with the General Studies program – see discussion in Section B.)

Students completing the Bachelor’s degree program must take a capstone course (ED 491 or GS 491); students completing the Associate’s degree do not. The capstone course provides students an opportunity to reflect on their academic experiences and think about career goals; it is also an opportunity to conduct program assessment. Students completing the Associate’s degree could benefit from having some type of capstone or culminating experience requirement. Based on the number of hours required to obtain the Associate’s degree and the current required course work there is room in the curriculum to add a capstone type course requirement. This would provide an avenue for marketing the program and also assessing the student learning outcome achievements for the program.

## B. Program Quality

The Self-Study report clearly identifies the number of credit hours required to complete an Associate’s degree in General Studies; the credit hours required for the Bachelor’s degree is also specified. While credit hours within specific areas (e.g., Social Science; Arts and Humanities; etc.) are identified, the report does not identify how courses counting for general education are differentiated from other courses. For example, what differentiates a Social Science general education course from other Social Science courses? How do courses receive a “general education” designation? Or, are all 100- 200-level courses offered at BSHU considered general education courses and thus included in the General Studies program? If so, then this should be noted.

The distinction between general education coursework and the General Studies degree (for which this review is being conducted) is important, as the primary difference seems to be the capstone course required for the Bachelor’s degree.

The Self-Study report does not provide any information on the structure of the oversight of the General Studies program. The report does indicate that there is a director, but it seems that the director has multiple roles (e.g., Associate Dean) and it is not clear how the faculty teaching in the program ensure consistency between semesters, or how the program might be modified or altered. What is the course approval process on campus and how does this relate to the general education program. Is there a faculty committee or Council that meets on a regular basis to discuss the General Studies program? Is there a mechanism (e.g., a committee and/or advisory council) that provides input about the program to the Director? What mechanisms are in place that allow for curricular revision and adjustment once assessment results on student learning outcomes are known? These are important questions to answer and/or consider for the program to move forward and grow.

According to the Self-Study report, all programs at BHSU are required to complete annual assessments using LEAP (Learning Enhancement Assessment Process), including general education courses. The student learning outcomes for general education (pages 14-17) are clear, well-articulated, and measurable. However, the results of the LEAP assessment are not provided in the report.

The Self-Study report states that the General Studies program has been exempted from the assessment process because “*all but one course used in the major is already evaluated within its home department.*” However, since the General Studies program builds upon the general education coursework, it would be useful to see the LEAP assessment results for the review period. In addition, the results from LEAP could provide supporting and/or validating evidence as to the program’s quality and effectiveness

The general education goals, both SGR and BHSU, and the three institutional requirements – writing intensive, experiential learning, and globalization – provide a foundation for students to be prepared for engaged citizenry. These requirements also prepare students for coursework in their selected emphasis areas.

Structurally, both the Associate’s and Bachelor’s General Studies degree programs give students the opportunity to take ownership of their educational experience – however, there are no processes currently in place to provide evidence that graduates are demonstrating this (no assessment plan in place). The lack of assessment of the program provides a challenge in evaluating the overall quality of the program. Given that students are able to create and follow their own curriculum there is no guarantee that each student will have similar educational experiences and/or rigor.

The Self-Study report does recognize the need for the General Studies program to develop and implement an assessment plan. This is an important first step because assessment is a vital component of continuous improvement, is needed to inform program development, resource needs and allocation, and to provide information on effectiveness (stakeholder value).

The General Studies program should develop an assessment plan that builds upon what is already being done on campus. For example, the program should make use of the LEAP assessments since the institution is already carrying out assessment in the general education courses and those courses are the foundation for the General Studies program. One way to do this is to first construct a curriculum matrix that

identifies the linkages between the General Studies program learning outcomes with those of the general education courses to identify which LEAP assessment data is relevant.

The Self-Study report also states that all students pursuing the Associate's degree must complete the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency Examination prior to graduation. However, the results from this assessment are not provided in the report. The results of the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency Examination should be used in the assessment of the Associate's degree program.

Implementing assessment within the capstone course is a vital component of assessing the effectiveness of the General Studies program. The Self-Study report provides two examples of student's capstone experiences and how they were used to promote the program. While the stories are powerful, it should be recognized that without a formal assessment process there is no way to identify if these were isolated experiences or if the capstone course provides this experience on a consistent basis.

Incorporating assessment into the capstone course should also build on what is already being done on campus. For example, it seems that the capstone course is closely aligned with the learning outcomes for BHSU's experiential learning requirement. Thus, the assessment instruments and rubrics used in courses meeting the experiential learning criteria should be useable in assessing the capstone course.

#### C. Costs

As currently structured, the program is delivered at a very low cost to the institution. Given that adjuncts are typically paid less than full-time faculty, using adjuncts does yield cost savings for the institution. However, the reliance on adjuncts also carries costs in terms of lack of continuity and/or coherence in the program. In addition, having part-time faculty be responsible for the program can result in a perception that the program is not important to the institution.

#### D. Program Productivity

The Self-Study report provides data on graduates for the review period (2010/11 – 2016/17); data on enrollment head-counts by gender and ethnicity for the institution and the program are also provided. While this information is helpful in evaluating the program productivity, reporting of enrollments in specific courses – such as the capstone course - would also aid in evaluating program productivity, demand for the program, and planning for the future.

The number of declared majors is an indicator of program strength and is a barometer of future demand for the curriculum. Based on fall semester head-count data on declared majors it is evident that there has been significant growth in the Bachelors General Studies program (from 6 in 2010/11 to 34 in 2015/16); although higher than previous years, the preliminary numbers for 2016/17 are slightly below 2015/16 AY. On the other hand, the Associates degree has been trending downward since 2010 (from 142 in 2010/11 to 88 in 2015/16); a trend that will continue based on preliminary numbers for fall 2016/17 (67).



The number of declared majors in any program is influenced by the overall enrollment at the institution; thus, it is important to evaluate the trend in declared General Studies majors in conjunction with institutional enrollment. Based on the information provided in the Self-Study report, enrollment declined significantly between 2010/11 and 2011/12 – from 5,403 to 5,263 – but has since been trending upward – rising from 5,263 in 2011/12 to 5,346 in 2015/16. With overall lower enrollments at the institutional level, the observed downward trend in declared General Studies majors is to be expected. Although expected or explained, steps should be taken to minimize or reverse the observed trend.

Recognizing the role the Associate's degree plays in students completing degrees at other institutions is also important. For example, it is very common for students to complete their general education coursework at one institution in preparation for completing a 4-year degree and/or professional degree at another institution. The Reviewer's sense is that this is true for BHSU as well – but this is not clearly reflected in the document. Understanding the role that the Associate's degree plays in students' educational plans will provide the institution with ways to market its program to stakeholders and could also facilitate the process of obtaining resources for the program.

#### E. Plans for the Future

The Self-Study report identifies the desired future direction of the program. There is recognition that the current structure of the program does not provide an adequate opportunity to assess the program. To that end, the plan is to add an additional course at the beginning of the program – sort of a bookend. In the Reviewer's opinion, this is a step in the right direction; however, given the sparse assessment of the program's effectiveness the addition of a new course should not be undertaken without first identifying a plan for assessment.

The Self-Study report identifies the specific goal of “*increasing the number of General Studies majors by 5% over a 10-year period (page 37);*” however, it is not clear if the goal is for the Bachelor's degree only or for both the Associate's and Bachelor's combined. Strategies undertaken to achieve the stated goal will depend on which degree is being targeted.

The Self-Study report identifies the plan, with appropriate benchmarks for measuring progress. While clearly stated and appropriate, the plan seems to be applicable only to the Bachelor's degree program. What are BHSU's plans for the Associate's degree program?

The Self-Study report states that “*Currently, the BHSU General Studies Program consists of just one course in the major (page 37).*” In the Reviewer's opinion, this statement is somewhat misleading given that the Bachelor's General Studies program consists of a diverse set of courses with one common core requirement (page 12) and the Associate's General Studies program has no such requirement (page 11). Based on the Reviewer's personal experience, the institution's perception of the program plays an important role in a program's ability to achieve its goals – if the institution views the program as a single course, achieving the stated goals for the future may be more difficult.

#### F. Assessment of Progress

The Self-Study report identifies that this is the first program review for both the Associate's and Bachelors General Studies degree program. The report does not identify when the General Studies program was initiated, so there is no clear statement of how long the program has been in operation. However, the program has been in place for at least seven years given that data for student enrollment from 2010 is provided.

### III. Overall Assessment of Program

#### A. Strengths

*Interdisciplinary nature and self-selection of courses to be included in the program.* This aspect makes it very relevant to today's employment market and the need for students to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills.

*Individualized curriculum design.* Allows students to take ownership of their educational experience and provides them an opportunity to develop the specific skills necessary to pursue their chosen career path.

*Foundation in general education.* The general education goals, both SGR and BHSU, and the three institutional requirements – writing intensive, experiential learning, and globalization – provide a foundation for students to be prepared for engaged citizenry; these requirements also prepare students for coursework in their selected emphasis areas.

#### B. Limitations

*Interdisciplinary nature and self-selection of courses to be included in the program.* Approach yields a curriculum that appears less cohesive and structured and can result in a perception that the program lacks rigor and/or is a "last resort" type of degree.

*Individualized curriculum design.* When each student pursues a unique curriculum, how does one assess the learning outcomes that provide a measurement of the program's quality and how does the program ensure consistency in academic rigor across diverse curriculums.

*Budget allocation to the program.* The current budget allocation allows for a single-adjunct instructor per semester – which implies only one course offering per semester. The current budget provides insufficient resources to carry out the program's plan for future development which includes a new course and promotional materials for the program. Additional resources will be needed for the program to grow.

*Program oversight and curricular changes.* There is no clear identification of who oversees the program on the part of the faculty. The process for approving new courses, assuring that courses are meeting specified learning objectives, and which courses are included in the general education curriculum is not entirely clear.

#### IV. Recommendations

**1. *Develop and implement an assessment plan for both the Associate's and Bachelor's General Studies program.***

The assessment plan should build upon what is already being done on campus. This can be accomplished by making use of the LEAP assessments in the general education courses and the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency Examination.

The assessment plan should include a curriculum matrix that identifies where SGR, BHSU and program learning outcomes are being met and assessment data could be collected. The curriculum matrix will be useful in identifying what LEAP assessment data is relevant through the linkages between the General Studies program learning outcomes with those of the general education courses. Curriculum matrix can also ensure that assessment data is being collected on all learning outcomes.

The assessment plan should include assessment within the capstone course and build on what is already being done on campus (e.g., instruments and rubrics used for assessing experiential learning requirement).

**2. *Incorporate new course into the Associate's and Bachelor's degree program.***

**a) *Implement a capstone course requirement appropriate for the Associate's degree.*** This would provide a means of assessing the program and provide students the opportunity to reflect on their educational experiences and career objectives.

**b) *Implement an "entry" course requirement appropriate for the Bachelor's degree.*** This would provide a means of providing a more cohesive structure to the General Studies program; gives students the opportunity for career exploration prior to designing their curriculum; and provides another opportunity for assessing the effectiveness of the program.

If the program faces constraints due to available faculty resources or credit hours, the capstone course for the Associate's degree could also serve as the entry course for the Bachelor's.

Collaboration with the career center (if BHSU has one) would be beneficial to the students in identifying career opportunities. Collaboration with the career center would also assist students in developing / designing their curriculum and capstone projects.

**3. *Develop and implement a graduating senior student survey for the Capstone class.***

Surveying graduating students will assist in tracking the types of jobs graduates have obtained, provide a means of keeping up with alumni, and in developing promotional materials for the program.

**4. *Increase institutional budget support to the General Studies program.***

The current budget provides insufficient resources to carry out the program's plan for future development which includes a new course and promotional materials for the program. Additional resources are needed for the program to grow.