A Message from our Director

Dear Bachelor of General Studies Baccalaureate Degree Students,

For those of you who do not know me, before you read any further, please email me right now or better yet, set up an appointment for us to meet at one of the regional sites! Throughout the entire year I have advising available once a month at all of our area locations. All Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.) majors should see me at least once a year. If you are new to the program or if you are moving toward your last semester you should make sure that we see each other at least once a semester. I want you to know that I am here to assist you throughout this very exciting journey towards graduation.

It has been my honor to serve as the Adviser and Director for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences’ B.G.S. degree program for nearly 30 years. Certainly much has changed in the last 30 years; we now offer courses in traditional, blended and online formats and provide our students with a wide selection of courses. Yet while much has changed, thankfully some things remain the same. NIU’s College of LA&S is committed to providing our B.G.S. students with a strong, interdisciplinary, well respected baccalaureate experience. The B.G.S. provides you with a highly integrated well rounded education. It serves as an outstanding foundation for graduate school or professional school.

I have had the pleasure of working with countless students in this program, you continue to motivate and impress me. Every commencement I am filled with elation and inspiration as I watch our B.G.S. students walk across the stage. One of the most rewarding aspects of my role as Director, is experiencing that beautiful reciprocity as you continue to teach and encourage me. Thank you for that privilege.

My best,
Judy Santacaterina

What is a B.G.S. Degree?

The Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.) degree program could be the chance you have been waiting for to finish your college degree. The program is tailored to the needs of adult returning students whose personal and work obligations preclude their enrolling as full-time day students on the DeKalb campus.

The courses are taught by Northern Illinois University professors during the evenings and weekends at the NIU regional campuses located in Rockford, Naperville, and Hoffman Estates.

The B.G.S. degree offers courses delivered in the traditional face-to-face classroom setting and a blended format of face-to-face and online instruction. Its varied curriculum in humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences assures a broad-based education that includes critical thinking and communication skills, cultural awareness, and ethical values that employers welcome.

The B.G.S. harnesses technology for challenging and rewarding education whether you’re preparing to enter the job market, changing careers, or seeking personal development.

For more information about the BGS degree and requirements, please visit our website:
http://www.niu.edu/clasep/courses/bgs

For more information about tuition and rates please visit:
http://www.niu.edu/bursar/
I cannot claim ownership for this advice but am passing on words of wisdom I have gotten from other students and advisor, Judy Santacaterina. Be open to new learning experiences. One of the greatest benefits of pursuing a B.G.S. degree is the opportunity to take a wide range of courses. I have been able to take classes on the history of Native Americans, business ethics, severe weather, and ancient Mesopotamian history, to name a few. Each one is a fascinating subject. They have broadened my experiences and helped me better understand the world.

How does your B.G.S. degree fit into your life plan? Prior to entering NIU, my educational focus was communications and marketing. However, at this point in my career and life, my goal is to earn a college degree and continue to be a life-long learner. My previous work at a nonprofit foundation included managing grant projects for students with disabilities. I enjoyed this work and was able to arrange a B.G.S. internship which provided more direct interaction with students and staff. It led to my current part time position as a job coach for students with disabilities. Part of the benefit of continuing education is the opportunity to have new experiences and begin new career paths.

What do you like best about NIU? Flexibility. NIU provides adult students a variety of ways to earn a quality education. I have been able to take rigorous classes at the suburban campuses, on-line, and classes that meet once a week. It really works with my schedule and helps me achieve my educational goal.

What’s something people might not know about you? People may not know two of my children are in the military. My daughter is a doctor in the Navy in her third year of her residency program and is stationed in Norfolk, VA. My oldest son is a Captain in the Army and is currently on his second deployment in Afghanistan. We are looking forward to having him back home this summer and are planning a family reunion. It gets harder and harder to coordinate schedules with adult children so I really treasure our times together.

Someone You Should Know: Donna Hutchinson

Each semester we will highlight a B.G.S. student or instructor we feel is important for you to know. This semester we are featuring Donna Hutchinson, a student in the B.G.S. program at NIU.

What made you decide to return to school? I started college right after finishing high school, but career opportunities, a husband, and four children postponed plans for completing my degree. I promised myself I would go back to school and finish my education before my children graduated from college. That day is now on the horizon. My youngest is due to graduate next spring. NIU’s B.G.S. program offered me the best options and flexibility. It has been a wonderful experience. I started classes last year and am on track to graduate December 2014, one semester before my son. NIU's B.G.S. program offered me the best options and flexibility. It has been a wonderful experience. I started classes last year and am on track to graduate December 2014, one semester before my son.

What has been a challenge for you as a B.G.S. student? Although I have many years of work experience, having been in management at a New York television station and director of a nonprofit foundation in Chicago, I was nervous about going back to school. I had volunteered in my children's classrooms, but had not taken a class in over 27 years. I knew my research skills were rusty and I was nervous about meeting the academic challenges. However, the professors have been very supportive, the courses fascinating, and the NIU students have been helpful and interesting.

What has been one of your greatest accomplishments while being a student at NIU? With the brutal winter we have had, my first thought on a great accomplishment is simply getting to class on some of the snowy, frigid nights. However, acing my first exam ranks high as a personal achievement. It felt good to work hard at my first course, master the material and get an A on the test. I have put in a lot of hours studying, and not always done quite as well, but my first few successes helped build my confidence.

What advice do you have for other B.G.S. students? I cannot claim ownership for this advice but am passing on words of wisdom I have gotten from other students and advisor, Judy Santacaterina. Be open to new learning experiences. One of the greatest benefits of pursuing a B.G.S. degree is the opportunity to take a wide range of courses. I have been able to take classes on the history of Native Americans, business ethics, severe weather, and ancient Mesopotamian history, to name a few. Each one is a fascinating subject. They have broadened my experiences and helped me better understand the world.

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As the B.G.S. director and advisor, Judy Santacaterina is actively involved in the continued support of our B.G.S. students. Whether you would like more information about the program, need advice on which courses to take, or just need someone to help you through the process of going back to school, Judy and the College's B.G.S. program staff are dedicated to helping you succeed and reach your educational goals.

Have you met Judy yet?

Judy Santacaterina
Director
B.G.S. Program
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jsantaca@niu.edu

Forty-one years, three months, 28 days  by Jodie Butler

Story originally published by NIU Today on February 26, 2014: http://www.niutoday.info/2014/02/26/forty-one-years-three-months-28-days/

Bob Dalaskey, a 59-year-old divorced father of two living in Naperville, “cooked chicken for KFC during high school to save money for college.” He enrolled at NIU in August of 1972 as a business and marketing major.

“I struggled with some classes, received average grades and, after a couple of years, I ran out of money for school. I tried working while going to school, but that only increased the distractions, so I took a semester off to work. I returned to school the following year, but soon ran out of money again. When I took another semester off after completing 93 hours, I started to find my way in the business world,” he says.

“Although I always intended to return to finish my degree someday, I started what turned out to be a successful business career in sales, later got married and started a family.”

As mothers will do, Dalaskey’s mom regularly asked when he was going to go back and finish his degree.

“My mother died on Sept. 11, 2006. I made a New Year’s resolution that year to go back to school to finish my degree and did not do it ... and the next year, the same. Too busy, traveling too much, not enough time,” he says. “Then my dad died in February of 2011, and I made the resolution all over again – and finally did something about it.”

Dalaskey drove to DeKalb and found Judy Santacaterina, the NIU student adviser for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Santacaterina discovered that Dalaskey only needed 11 more classes to graduate and that many of his classes taken 35 years before were still credit worthy for a liberal arts degree. “I gingerly made my way through all the online tools now so readily available to students, but very foreign to me, and signed up for two classes in January 2012. I earned a ‘B’ and an ‘A,’ so I signed up for two more classes that summer session then two more in the fall, two the following spring and then two more in summer again, and one class this past fall, earning straight A’s the rest of the way.”

Dalaskey, who completed his classes with a combination of traditional, online and hybrid classes. He graduated in December. Looking back, he is grateful to his instructors and impressed with the students.

“I think back fondly now on Judy Santacaterina; her husband, Professor Matt Swan (one of my instructors), Professor Toth and Professor Calleja; among all the other teaching staff that was so kind and patient with me while I finished my classes,” he says. “The other students were amazing, too! The young kids in class are just so smart and talented today.”

Given his decades-long affiliation with NIU, he is blessed with an uncommon perspective.

“Taking 41 years, 3 months, and 28 days to graduate from college, I am humbled by the experience, and thank NIU for the opportunity. I am very proud of the school as I look back at the growth and development that I have seen firsthand, on campus, over the past 40 years,” he says. “Because it was not an easy path to take to earn a degree, this all means so much more to me now. What drove me was a combination of perseverance and wanting to keep my promises.”

Any advice for current students? “If you can, complete your degree in four years, please do so, by all means, or you might just end up in an article for NIU Today!”
Student Career Success the Focus of NIU’s New President

In October [2013, NIU’s new president, Dr. Douglas D. Baker,] launched a series of campus meetings where he gathered nearly 800 students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members to discuss priorities for the university, identify challenges and brainstorm solutions. The meetings, billed as Bold Futures Workshops, represented the first step toward unleashing the creativity of those groups, and getting the NIU community to think beyond traditional boundaries.

“This is a chaotic time in higher education. Change is happening rapidly, and we must respond,” Baker said.

“Going forward, we must embrace a collaborative culture of change and innovation – all of us, or we will become irrelevant. The only unacceptable mistake will be to accept the status quo.”

Despite challenges facing the university, Baker is confident that NIU will emerge a stronger institution.

“At NIU, we have a heritage, we have a place and we have a wealth of dedicated people with the capacity to ratchet up our connectivity to this changing world,” he said. “In so doing, we can set a new example for shaping graduates who will live fulfilling lives and provide leadership in our communities and throughout the world.”

This story is part of an article published by NIU Today on November 13, 2013. To read the full article visit: http://www.niutoday.info/2013/11/13/niu-inaugurates-doug-baker-as-12th-president/

For more information about participating in upcoming Bold Futures Workshops visit: http://niu.edu/president/bold_futures

Important Dates and Deadlines in 2014

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
External Programming
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Check us out online!
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