

College of LA&S Bachelor of General Studies Assessment Report

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1. Introduction

a. HISTORY: The Bachelor of General Studies degree is a highly interdisciplinary, integrated baccalaureate degree awarded by the College of LA&S. The BGS is a viable baccalaureate program that has been in existence since the mid 70's. It was originally designed specifically for "adult learners" as a completion program offered in surrounding suburbs. Those locations were Rockford, Palatine and Glen Ellyn. Courses were offered in the evenings and on weekends at community colleges and then moved to our regional centers. At that time students completing a contract major in the College of LA&S also were awarded a BGS degree, which was truly a misnomer since the degrees were anything but "general". In the late 80's this changed and contract majors were required to complete either the BA or the BS. The BGS, by contrast, has remained focused on a broad-based curriculum and integration of knowledge across disciplines. The degree is a highly integrated interdisciplinary baccalaureate degree and the embodiment of a broad based liberal education. Therefore, NIU's baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes serves as a strong foundation for the BGS Student Learning Outcomes.

In CLAS, the current BGS requirements are:

- Earn at least 85 semester hours of credit in courses offered or approved by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with at least 30 of these hours in upper-division courses and at least 50 of these hours earned at NIU or at other baccalaureate institutions.
- Successfully complete at least 15 semester hours in behavioral and social science courses. These include all courses offered by the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Geography (except physical geography and meteorology courses), Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology.
- Successfully complete at least 15 semester hours in life, mathematical, and physical science courses. These include all courses offered by the Departments of Biological Sciences, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Computer Science, Geology and Environmental Geosciences, Mathematical Sciences, and Physics, as well as courses in physical geography and meteorology. The course used to satisfy the foundational studies quantitative literacy requirement of the General Education Program will *not* count in this area, however. (See "General Education Requirements.")
- Successfully complete 15 semester hours in humanities courses. These include all courses offered by the Departments of Communication, English, World Languages and Cultures, History, and Philosophy, except for ENGL 103, ENGL 203, ENGL 204, and COMS 100.
- Complete at least 30 semester hours after formal admission to the general program.

In addition, students must complete all general education and baccalaureate requirements, and may not apply more than 25 credits in any one department toward the 120 hours required for graduation. This restriction is included to ensure the broad-based and integrative nature of the BGS program. Students with more than 25 semester hours in a given department would be encouraged to pursue a major in that department.

b. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: Since its inception, the BGS has grown tremendously and is no longer an “off campus” program. After Program Prioritization, BGS moved out of the Provost Office and into the College LA&S. At the present time, there are approximately 180-200 BGS majors. Many of the students are “traditional” students taking the courses on the main campus but others may be completing their entire degree online. A growing population appears to be that of former NIU students who were pursuing majors primarily in LA&S and are now returning as BGS majors to complete their baccalaureate degrees primarily online. The on-line BGS program represents an opportunity for significant growth.

c. CHALLENGES: Due to the unique nature of the BGS, traditional assessment methods and templates are challenging. Other than the university’s foundational studies and the human diversity requirement, there is not a specific set of courses that all BGS graduates are required to complete. This has resulted in challenges surrounding methods of obtaining data as well as the amount of raw data have collected. These challenges provide us with future opportunities to explore and develop new requirements and curriculum.

2. Student Learning Outcomes for the Bachelor of General Studies:

Students who graduate with a Bachelor of General Studies Degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences will demonstrate:

1. Integrative and independent learning to attain and use knowledge in the humanities, behavioral and social science, and physical sciences.
2. Thinking and creating using multiple strategies to solve problems, examine global issues and solve problems.
3. Clear and effective communication in both oral and written forms of expression
4. Development and clarification of life goals through various transformational experiences.
5. A sense of citizenship and respect for people of diverse background and perspectives.
6. The use of basic information technology as learning, research and problem solving tool and use of information technology fundamentals to aid in the learning process.

3. Program-by-Baccalaureate Student Learning Outcomes Matrix

BGS SLOs	Baccalaureate SLO							
	A. Integrate knowledge of global inter-connections / inter-dependencies	B. Exhibit intercultural competences ...	C. Analyze issues that interconnect human life and the natural world	D. Demonstrate critical, creative, independent thought	E. Communicate clearly and effectively	F. Collaborate with others...	G. Use / combine quantitative / and qualitative reasoning skills ...	H. Synthesize knowledge / apply them creatively...
1. Integrative and independent learning...	X		X					
2. Using multiple strategies to solve problems ...				X			X	X
3 clear and effective oral/written communication					X			
4. Transformational experiences	X		X	X				X
5 Citizenship/ respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives.		X				X		
6. The use of information technology as a	x			x	x	x		

problem solving and research tool.								
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Since the requirements of the BGS are defined in terms of content areas rather than specific courses, the coursework for each student in the program may vary tremendously. Therefore, the curriculum map is constructed to correlate the major components of the BGS, rather than specific courses, with SLOs. The one exception to this observation is the recently proposed requirement for an internship or capstone experience for every student in the program,

	1. Learning Integrative and independent	3. Using multiple strategies to solve problems	4. clear and effective oral/written communication	5. Transformational experiences	6. Citizenship/respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
Coursework in Humanities*	B/D	B/D			
Coursework in Natural Sciences/Math*	B/D	B/D			
Coursework in Social Sciences*	B/D	B/D			
General Education Curriculum	B,D	B,D			B,D
Writing Intensive Req.			D, P		
Human Diversity Req.	D				D, P
Internship/Capstone Experience	P		P	P	

*Beginning/Developmental /Proficient based on lower division/upper division coursework

5. Assessment Methods

1. Direct assessment of SLO's is hampered by the fact that the BGS program relies on curricular offerings from academic units across the College/University. Other programs rely heavily on course-embedded activities for direct assessment data; the BGS program does not currently have access to those departmental data and must rely on indirect methods or alumni/exit surveys. However, one of the pillars of the BGS program is the broad-based and integrated nature of the curriculum, so an evaluation of the relative success of students in completing these disciplinary requirements (i.e. at least 15 credits in each discipline) could be considered a valid assessment tool for SLOs 1-3.

2. Completion of discipline-specific or integrative Writing-Infused courses. Evaluation of the number of writing-infused courses, and the distribution of these courses across the curriculum, can be used to evaluate how effectively students in the BGS program are progressing with respect to SLOs 1-3.

3. Completion of HD courses. Evaluation of the number and distribution of these courses across the curriculum can be used to evaluate how effectively students in the BGS program are progressing with respect to SLOs 2 3, 5, 6

4. Student surveys: the use of exit surveys and alumni surveys can provide indirect data on student's perceptions of the success of the BGS program with respect to SLOs 1-2, and direct feedback with respect to SLOs 4, 5, 6.

5. Internship/Capstone. The reflective writing component of these courses will allow direct assessment of SLOs 4-6.