

July 30, 2013

TO: Martha Bradley
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs

FR: Ed Barbanell
Director, University Studies Program

RE: **Bachelor of University Studies (B.U.S.) Self-Study**

1.) Program Overview:

The Bachelor of University Studies (BUS) program was originally approved by the Utah State Board of Higher Education in December, 1971. Its stated purpose was “to enable students in the university who are interested in some kind of a major beyond those now offered to help define and plan their own academic careers from courses offered in the university as a whole.” The program allows students to propose and pursue an individualized, interdisciplinary major not otherwise achievable within the current structure of the University. As such, the BUS program sets us apart from many institutions with which we vie for students (see Section 2 below).

Students must apply to the BUS program. Working in conjunction with a faculty advisor, students prepare a proposal that first details in narrative form (i) what the overall idea of the proposed major is, (ii) why that idea cannot be pursued within the existing structure of the University – why, that is, it is not achievable through some combination of existing major(s) and minor(s), and (iii) how their major will prepare them for graduate school, employment or other life plans. Next, the student must lay out a specific, appropriate, and rigorous program of study, including explicit ideas for a final thesis project that will be done under the supervision of their faculty advisor. In addition to their major program of study, BUS students must satisfy all of the university’s General Education and Bachelor Degree requirements, including either the B.A. language requirements or the B.S. quantitative requirements. The program’s requirement of 56 upper-division hours (3000-level and above) significantly exceeds the 40-hour requirement of most other majors at the University.

BUS proposals are reviewed and approved by the University Studies Committee, a ten-member faculty committee selected by the Personnel and Elections Committee of the Academic Senate and appointed by the President.¹ Committee members are appointed for staggered three-year terms, so that there are 3-4 new members and 6-7 returning members every year. Multiple committee meetings are scheduled each Fall and Spring semesters, where the student/faculty advisor team is asked to come and discuss their proposal with the committee.

¹ Until 2006-07, the Chair of the University Studies committee was also determined by the P&E Committee. In August, 2007, then-President Michael Young, on the recommendation of outgoing committee chair Tom Maloney (Economics), made the still-current Director of the Program the permanent Chair of the committee.

If the proposal is accepted, then the student is set up as a University Studies major in their faculty advisor's home college. However, in terms of ongoing administration and academic advisement, including tracking progress toward and clearance for graduation, the student is supervised by the BUS Director. Upon completion of their degree program, students are awarded a "Bachelor of University Studies", which is a degree-type, like a B.A. or a B.S, and they can participate in their home college's commencement ceremony. The specific title of their degree, e.g., "Biomedical Illustration", appears on their diploma.

Over 600 students have been awarded the BUS degree over the last forty years. As part of this self-study, we collected and evaluated data on all of the 161 students who have been accepted into the program in since the year 2000, when the current BUS Director's tenure began, to see how the program is currently functioning (see Section 5). Additionally, we surveyed over 200 alumni who were BUS recipients, to see how well their BUS experience has served them in their post-baccalaureate lives (see Section 6). We received 85 responses (a remarkable 42% response rate). From this all this information, it seems quite clear that the program serves its primary purpose very well.

In addition to serving its primary and intended function, the BUS program has also served as an excellent weathervane and anemometer, accurately gauging the winds of the changing interests of both our students and the world, and thus serving equally as well as an accurate forecaster of where higher education may be headed. As such, the BUS program has functioned as the impetus for the creation of a host of vibrant degree programs now spread across the University: Asian Studies, Entertainment Arts and Engineering, Environmental and Sustainability Studies, Ethnic Studies, Interdisciplinary Design and International Studies, just to name a few of the more recent ones.

Indeed, when a significant number of students over a short period of time successfully propose programs of study that are quite similar in nature, it is incumbent on the program's Director to seek out deans and department chairs, so they can create programs and communities of learners for these students in their established departments. Regardless of how the program is promulgated and administered, it should never become or operate as a pseudo-department: it should fill a void, operating as the mortar between the bricks of established programs and departments.

That being said, the main recommendation gleaned from the BUS recipient survey is that we need to create a better sense of community for BUS students and find ways to better weave them into the fabric of the University while they are here, as well as keeping better connected with them once they have graduated.

2.) What the University Studies Program is and what it is not:

At the time of its inception, the BUS Program was one of only a handful in the country that allowed students to individually construct their programs of study from the full range of existing courses. In the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) the BUS program was and still is unique², although Westminster College has a customizable major quite similar to ours. Among PAC-12 institutions, only the University of Southern California currently has a program like ours: an Interdisciplinary Studies BA/BS

² Utah Valley University currently has a proposal in process for a University Studies Program similar to ours, but its prospects with the Regents are uncertain.

where students can create individual programs of study. The exceptional nature of our program, combined with its effectiveness for students (see Sections 5 & 6 below), suggests that we should better leverage the program as a signature experience for students at the University of Utah. However, please see additional comments about this in the final paragraph of Section 4 below.

There are two other kinds of programs that are sometimes discussed in conjunction with our BUS program, but they need to be distinguished both from it and from one another. The first of these are various “General Studies” programs, such as Utah State University offers, where students minimally satisfy institutional requirements while having an “identifiable area of emphasis”. In addition to lacking both rigor and breadth, such programs typically do not require students to work closely with a faculty mentor or to have broad institutional review of individual student’s proposals, even if such a proposal is required.

The second sorts of programs that sometimes get conflated with our BUS program are variously labeled “Integrated Studies” or “Interdisciplinary Studies” programs, such as Weber State University (USHE) and the University of Arizona (PAC-12) offer. Typically, students in such programs choose 2-3 existing “areas of study” – minors, emphases and the like – that may or may not need to be conceptually connected together by the student in any way, e.g., in a final capstone class or project. In terms of academic rigor, these second sorts of programs are more demanding than General Studies programs, but the students’ programs are constructed out of pre-existing collections of courses, rather than from the full range of the institution’s course offerings.

Both of these kinds of programs, General Studies and Integrated Studies, are primarily targeted to two audiences: traditional students who are struggling to identify and/or execute a path to graduation through traditional majors, and adult learners, new or returning students, who are seeking degrees for personal or professional reasons. In either case, a primary function of these programs is to expedite the matriculation of students not ideally suited for the depth and rigor of traditional majors.

In contrast to both other kinds of programs, students who successfully propose BUS programs are typically traditional students, those looking for a standard “major-based” program, just one we do not offer. In addition to having a specific faculty advisor, BUS students’ proposals are vetted through a committee of regular faculty. The BUS program’s requirement of 56 upper-division hours (3000-level and above) far exceeds the minimum of 40 hours required by most other majors at the University of Utah. The result of all this is that, based on the survey of BUS recipients, **almost 65% of BUS recipients have gone on to pursue either a Masters or a Ph.D!**

3.) Scholarships

There is currently one scholarship available to BUS students: the Ren T Rice scholarship, which awards BUS students \$2,000 toward tuition. Mr. Rice was a recipient of a BUS degree from the University of Utah in 1985, and has funded this scholarship since 2005. From the late 1970s through the 1998-99 academic year, the BUS program had one tuition-waiver scholarship available: a Continuing Student Scholarship. Due to a reassessment of such scholarships by the Financial Aid and Scholarships Committee in 1997, this scholarship was no longer available to BUS students. Given both the size of the program and the number of annual applicants for the scholarship, having one scholarship available sufficiently serves the program’s needs.

4.) Size of the Program:

In the original 1971 proposal, it was stated that student demand for the BUS program “is difficult to estimate, since it is a wholly optional degree. . . . Likely the [students] who would become involved are the more serious, dedicated and highly motivated students, probably no more than ten in the first year.” Although the program initially was much larger than its creators estimated, around 30 accepted proposals per year, it has since leveled off to 10-15 accepted proposals per year. This seems like the right size for the program as it is currently administered.

The first applications and admissions to the program occurred in Fall 1972. As you can see by the chart in Appendix 3, the number of proposals accepted each year, although quite variable from year to year, averaged around 30 per year from the program’s inception through the mid-1980s. Except for some aberrations during 1988-92, when thirty-eight “Pre-Architectural Studies” proposals were approved over a four-year period, the number of proposals accepted each year steadily declined through the late-1990s, leveling off at around 10-15 proposal per year, where it has remained.

Looking back through the proposals approved from 1972 through the early 1990s, and looking as well at many of the new majors that were approved in that period – particularly the undergraduate degrees in Architecture and Environmental and Sustainability Studies – it seems clear that many of the recurring interests’ of BUS students proposals during that period were satisfied by departmental programs long in the works, as they should have been.

Similarly, over the last fourteen years, much of the ebb and flow of the numbers of proposals can be explained by the initiation of new degree programs because of BUS students. A typical cycle that has reoccurred several times is that over a period of 1-2 years, a group of students will propose strikingly similar degrees, e.g., Social Justice or International Studies. When that has happened, the BUS Director has sought out the appropriate Deans and Department Chairs, encouraging them to create new programs within their academic unit to accommodate students’ interests. Once these new programs are approved, then students interested in those areas no longer come to the BUS program.

The BUS program has never been heavily marketed to current or perspective students. We do maintain an open and active dialogue with academic advisors across campus, and information about the program is readily available both in print and on the web. But the general notion of encouraging students to seek out the BUS program in lieu of established majors at the University seems problematic on a number of fronts. However, given how the BUS program distinguishes the University from many of its peers, it may well be the case that the net benefits of promoting the program outweigh such problems. Actively promoting the program would also have effects on the program itself, primarily in terms of its size and the concomitant administrative burdens this would cause.

5.) Profile of Current and Recent BUS students

We have taken a detailed look at all students who have had their proposals accepted during the current Director's tenure, 2000-present. Some significant figures:

- In terms of the home college of the students' faculty advisors, students have come from **every college on campus excepting Pharmacy and Law**. This includes the College of Medicine, from which we have had eight students. Students who graduate with a BUS from the College of Medicine are included in their commencement program.
- Again, in terms of the College where their faculty advisor is: Fine Arts (42 proposals), Humanities (22), Education (15) and Science (13) are the colleges from which we have received the most proposals. See Appendix 1 for a complete profile.
- Male 88 (55%)/ Female 73 (45%).
- White 98 (57%); Hispanic 14 (9%); Asian 5 (3%); Black 3 (2%); Unspecified 47 (30%).
- Of the 161 students accepted into the BUS program 2000-2013, **79% (127) have graduated with a BUS degree**; another 9% graduated after having changed their major. Most of the 13% who have not graduated have had their proposals accepted just in the last year or two.
- Of the 127 BUS graduates during this timeframe, nine (9) received **Honors** degrees and twenty-one (21) received the **Undergraduate Research Scholar Designation (URSD)**.
- Of the 14 self-identified Hispanic students who were accepted into the program, 13 graduated with a BUS degree.

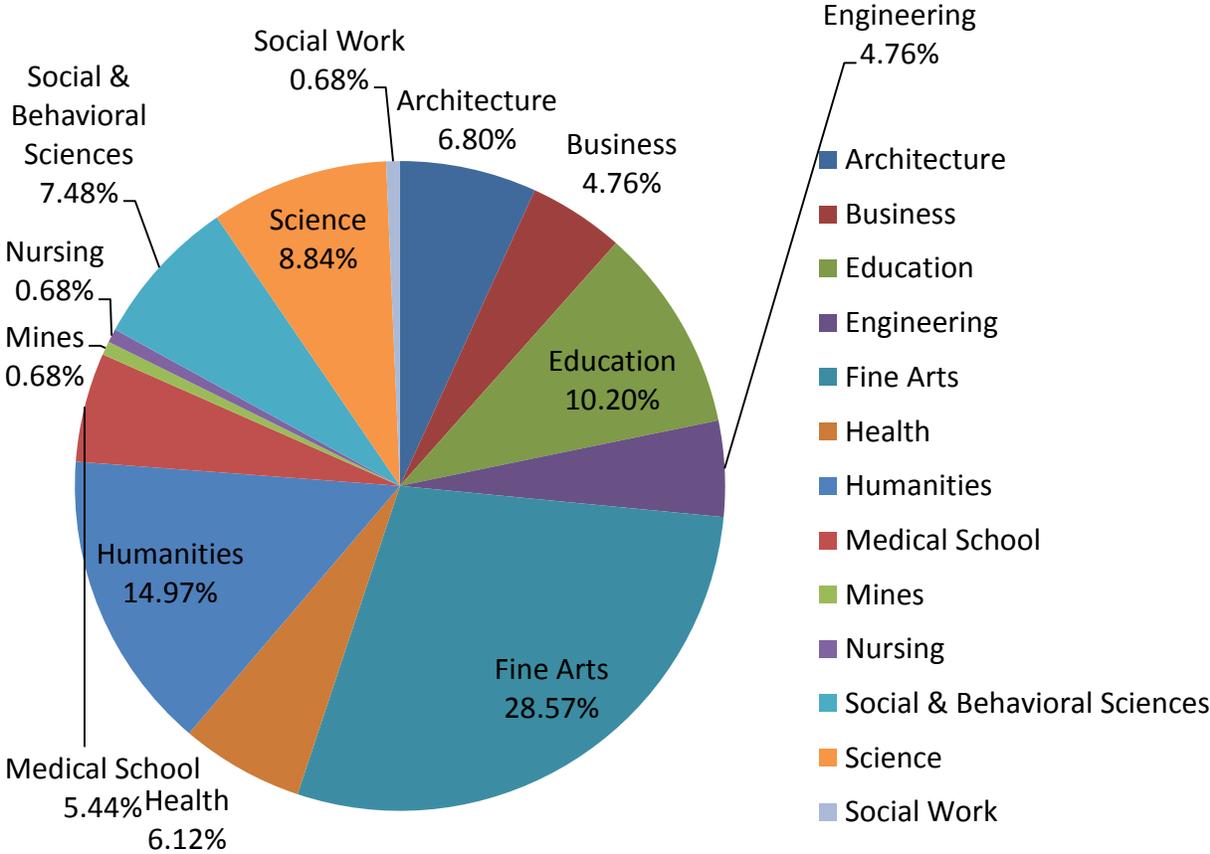
6.) Survey of BUS recipients

We were able to successfully contact approximately 200 BUS recipients about participating in a brief online survey. **Eighty-five, or 42%, responded to the survey; of those, forty-seven (55%) wrote additional comments**. Some significant results:

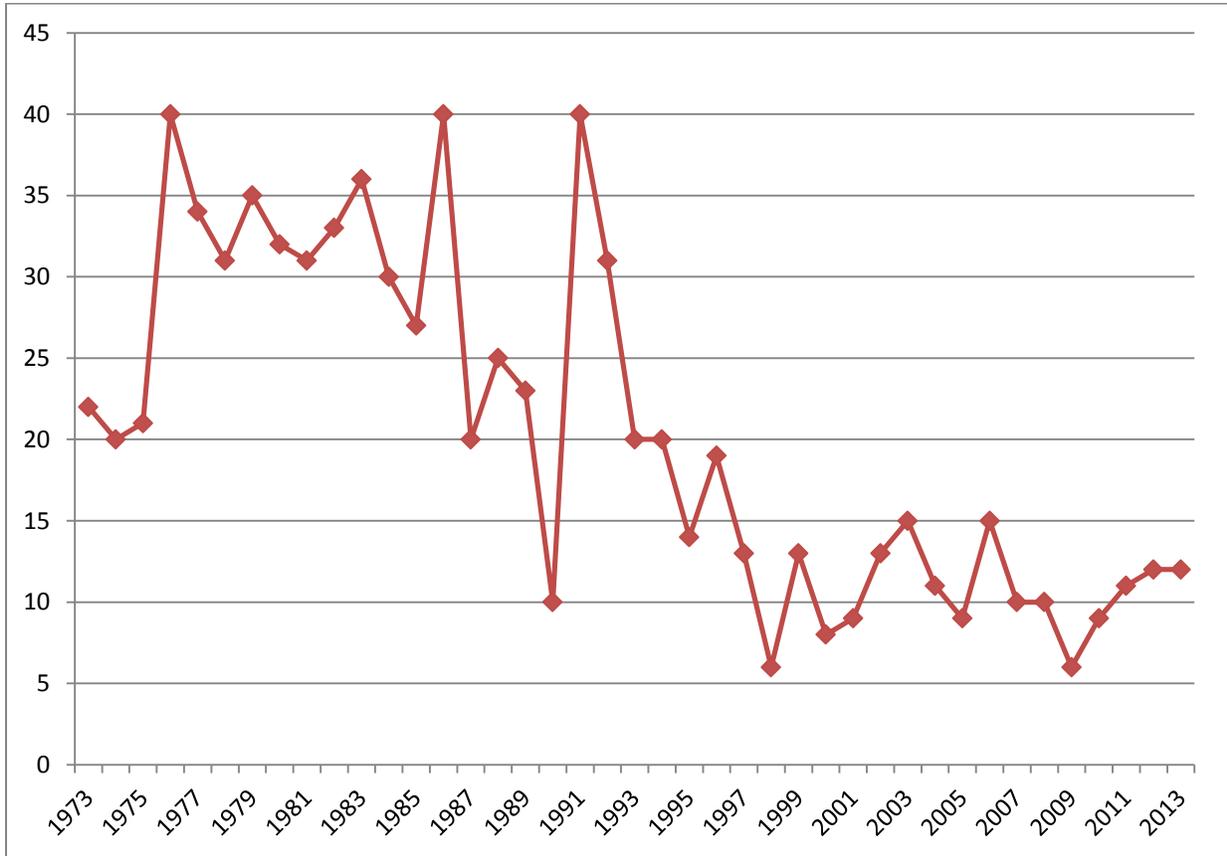
- Regarding how satisfied they were with their BUS program in terms of their overall experience and education, **76% were Completely Satisfied** and 20% percent were Somewhat Satisfied.
- Fifty-five (65%) went on to pursue a graduate degree; **Thirty-two (58%) received a Master's Degree; Eleven (20%) received a Doctorate**. Forty-eight (56%) believed there was a direct connection between their BUS program and their additional education.
- Concomitant with the reported level of satisfaction with their BUS experience, the written comments were preponderantly positive and thankful; many BUS recipients offered to be mentors and sounding boards for students. I have included a representative sample of comments in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1: Profile of Recent and Current BUS Students

College Distribution



Appendix 2: BUS Proposal Approved by Year



Average, 1973-1983: 30 proposals per year

Average, 1984-1993: 27 proposals per year

Average, 1994-2003: 13 proposals per year

Average, 2004-2013: 11 proposals per

Appendix 3: Selected Comments from BUS Recipient Survey:

- “When I describe my education at Utah people are astonished. I really had the best of the best. Why? Because my professor hand-picked classes with me and helped me focus my studies. He also pointed me toward Yale. He and I continued our relationship for many years after (professionally -- and eventually his own work became something about which I made decisions, which turned the table in a very powerful way.) I don't recall there was anyone more formal involved in my decisions at the time and am pleased to know now that there are. I'm always happy to work with any of your students as an outside advisor if appropriate.”
- “While I am not currently employed in the field of my BUS (the pay is rotten) I continue to use it in my leadership of the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. Also I can honestly say that if it wasn't for the BUS program I could not have made it through college with my level of PTSD from abuse in elementary school. The Program allowed me to take charge of my own education & work with a professor I was able to build a good working relationship with.”
- “The B.U.S. program is an example of how most school degrees should be constructed. With the ability to craft my own curriculum, I was able to graduate with a degree that not only suited my skills and interests, but was marketable in the job world.”
- “The BUS prepared me for interdisciplinary opportunities, experiences, and freedom to pursue a career path that can be described as a bricoleur - crafting a set of goals, responsibilities, and roles within defined job descriptions.”
- The BUS program at the University of Utah was the perfect solution to my education dilemma. I knew what I wanted to do and I knew the skills needed to do it, but there wasn't a program in place for me to pursue. The BUS program allowed me to customize a degree that has allowed me to be successful in my field of choice.”
- “The B.U.S. gave me the opportunity to pursue courses from a variety of departments that all pertained to my interest in international health, including economics, philosophy, development theory, anthropology, language and health sciences. It allowed me to take a number of graduate courses as an undergraduate and to pursue a curriculum that would have never been available to me from a "straight" degree. My son was so impressed with what it allowed me to accomplish as an undergraduate that he too chose to pursue a B.U.S. also which he completed last year. Thank you for making this great opportunity available!”
- “The B.U.S. degree is a fantastic alternative to "traditional bachelor degrees". I may not have gotten a bachelor's degree without this program. I have always valued this degree and feel that it has been as valuable (or more so) than any other degree I could have received.”