

## **Notice of Intent to Offer a New Degree and Major**

*Approved by the College of Letters & Science Academic Planning Council 3 November 2020.*

*Version date: 11/4/2020*

**a. Name of the proposed degree/major:** Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) / Major in Applied Social Science

**b. Home department/department-like unit and School/College:** Dean's Office, College of Letters & Science (L&S)

**c. Mode of delivery (face-to-face, online, other-specify):** Online

**d. Primary faculty contact person:** Greg Downey, Associate Dean for the Social Sciences

### **e. A description of the new program**

The BLS is a liberal arts degree designed to facilitate degree completion for returning adult students who have earned some college credit but who have not yet completed a first undergraduate degree. The proposed degree program supports the institutional goal of bringing the Wisconsin Idea to a broader audience of educationally underserved students across the state and region. The program will be delivered entirely online, under the auspices of the departments, faculty, and administrative support team of the UW-Madison College of Letters & Science. It will be centrally administered by the L&S Dean's Office, which will coordinate the work of the faculty oversight committee and a variety of campus offices and units that will support the program. In Fall 2019, L&S enrolled more than 16,000 undergraduate students working toward completion of bachelor's degree in at least one of the college's 66 undergraduate BA/BS majors. L&S students are typically admitted soon after completing high school as first time, full-time students who complete their Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, or other professionally oriented or accredited baccalaureate degrees in residence on or near the UW-Madison campus. (The average age of the Fall term undergraduate cohort is 18; the average age of the overall undergraduate student body is 20.) A very high proportion of these students successfully complete their undergraduate degrees, but the college believes it can do better. In creating this program, L&S proposes to serve non-residential students and part-time adult learners who have stopped out of college, through the delivery of a new online baccalaureate degree program and new interdisciplinary, applied majors to complement existing L&S baccalaureate degree programs and traditional majors.

The new BLS degree requires 120 undergraduate credits; within these 120 credits, students will complete 49-55 credits that meet UW-Madison General Education and L&S general studies requirements, as well as a 30-credit integrative, applied major. In recognition of the needs of the students for whom this program is intended, the program is designed to be more flexible than the traditional L&S residential programs, better able to accommodate transfer credit, and better suited to meet student interest in general, interdisciplinary, applied studies. Most (if not all) students are expected to enroll as part-time students, and to take courses in Fall, Spring, and Summer sessions. Advising guidance for these students will take the form of intensive coaching by professionals familiar with the demands of the adult learning sector.

### **f. Program content and level**

The BLS is designed as a generalist program of integrated, applied study across the traditional liberal arts and sciences at the undergraduate level. As with other UW-Madison undergraduate degrees, students earning the BLS will complete the University General Education Requirements as well as coursework that reflects the value L&S faculty place on breadth and integrated study in the arts and humanities, the social sciences, the natural and physical sciences, and the computational and data sciences. L&S courses that serve this program will be curated to ensure that they focus the capacities of liberal education on critical issues and big questions. Students in the BLS will study topics relevant to the problems of the day, with an emphasis on skills in communication, numerical reasoning and critical thinking, integrative learning, resiliency and adaptation to a changing world. As with other L&S majors, the integrative majors associated with this degree will require a minimum number of credits completed in UW-Madison coursework (considered “in-residence”), and at more advanced levels.

### **Bachelor of Liberal Studies Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this program, students will be able to analyze many kinds of information and data, including insights from their past experience, in a variety of ways, in order to identify important problems and issues, develop effective solutions, and communicate those solutions persuasively to a broad range of people.

Students will:

1. Identify and integrate many types and sources of information. Students will be able to recognize, reason with, and combine multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative information and data, from culturally diverse perspectives and sources.
2. Analyze information using a variety of methods. Students will be able to critically evaluate and analyze information using methods from the arts and humanities, the social sciences, the natural and physical sciences, and the computational and data sciences, informed by diverse cultural perspectives.
3. Investigate important problems, issues, and opportunities for change. Students will be able to approach complex topics from multiple perspectives, understanding them in a variety of contexts and from different cultural lenses.
4. Develop effective, culturally sensitive evidence-based solutions. Students will be able to combine their rigorous analysis of relevant evidence to develop and defend creative insights and effective solutions concerning these important issues.
5. Communicate persuasively with a broad range of people. Based on an understanding of the varied ways in which people experience the world, students will be able to collaborate and communicate proposed solutions effectively and ethically with people from a range of perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds.

To achieve these goals, the L&S faculty envision a program of study that will require:

- Completion of the standard UW-Madison General Education Requirements, which include specified minimum credit requirements in Breadth (Arts & Humanities, Natural and Physical Science, and Social Science), Communication, Ethnic Studies, and Quantitative Reasoning coursework.
- Additional breadth of study, such as in Computational and Data Science, as befits a modern degree in the liberal arts and sciences.
- At least one course designed to help students integrate prior academic, professional, and life experience that will serve as a bridge to more focused study in their major.
- At least 30 credits of the student's final 120 credits completed must be earned in UW-Madison courses.
- Students must earn at least a 2.000 overall GPA in all courses taken at UW-Madison.
- Courses taken to meet any category of requirement may, if appropriate, be used to meet other categories of requirements. (That is, a course taken to meet a General Education Requirement may also be used to meet Major and/or Degree requirements.)

To complement the general structure of this degree, students will be required to complete an applied integrative and interdisciplinary major:

- The major will include at least 30 credits of coursework.
- At least 15 credits of major coursework will include study at advanced undergraduate levels.
- Coursework in the major will include intentional efforts to integrate cross-disciplinary study on critical contemporary questions for which the various disciplinary areas are well-suited.
- Majors will afford students opportunities to integrate academic study with applied work completed in internships, professional/work, volunteer and service learning placements, career exploration coursework, etc. (This is not to be confused with credit for “life experience” or for work placement.)

As envisioned, this program design balances the flexibility returning students will need with the academic rigor and liberal arts and science strengths for which programs in the College of Letters & Science are known.

The first major to be associated with the BLS will be a program in Applied Social Science. Social science involves the systematic and evidence-based study of the social world — encompassing all of the political, economic, legal, technological and cultural ideas, structures and processes that humans created to live together as a society. Put simply, social science data, methods, and theories are used to understand how social life *works*, in order to help social life work *better*. Applied study across the social sciences, integrated with a broad liberal arts foundation of study, offers an ideal framework for identifying issues, questions, and opportunities that are important to humans, groups, institutions, and society. Methods used will help students search out, interpret, and understand information – and to communicate what they know to others.

Building upon the general learning outcomes above for a Bachelors of Liberal Studies degree, after completing a BLS major in Applied Social Science, a student should be able to analyze many kinds of information and data about social life and societal institutions, using the evidence, tools, and

theories of the social sciences, in order to identify important social problems and issues, develop effective solutions, and communicate those solutions persuasively to a broad range of people:

1. Students will be able to recognize, reason with, and combine **multiple forms of qualitative and quantitative information and data that are common to the social sciences**, from culturally diverse perspectives and sources.
2. Students will be able to critically evaluate and analyze information **using a variety of methods common to the social sciences**, informed by diverse cultural perspectives.
3. Students will be able to approach **complex social, interpersonal, and institutional issues and opportunities for innovation** from multiple perspectives, understanding them in a variety of contexts and from different cultural lenses.
4. Students will be able to use **tools and techniques common to the social sciences** to combine their rigorous analysis of relevant evidence to develop and defend creative insights and effective solutions concerning these important issues.
5. Based on an **understanding of the varied ways in which people experience social life and social institutions**, students will be able to collaborate and communicate proposed solutions effectively and ethically with people from a range of perspectives, cultures, and backgrounds.

#### **g. Resources required to deliver the program**

This program will be supported by program revenue. It is one of several programs UW-Madison is developing for online delivery, for which L&S already provides a limited menu of online courses that satisfy general education and other core requirements. By building on this foundation (and contributing further to the network of courses adapted to serve these programs), the College will be able to deliver the proposed BLS degree and associated majors.

L&S will receive financial support for course development and instruction from central campus, through a revenue-based budget model developed by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration. Once it reaches scale, the Chancellor's online initiative will be fully self-financing, with online tuition revenue covering all ongoing expenses and the initial start-up costs.

Campus and college resources are available to support the delivery of online instruction, including support for instructors who will serve this new audience. These resources include instructional support units and a research community that explores and implements research-based online course design and best practices for online learning, and L&S will partner with the UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies, which has extensive expertise in serving adult learners. All courses in the program will work toward a full review process for the Quality Matters instructional design framework, which is a nationally recognized program to certify online course quality. Finally, instructors will abide by the campus-approved Digital Education Principles that express UW-Madison quality standards for online teaching and learning.

In addition to resources dedicated to support online instruction that promotes effective learning, campus will provide a central student services hub designed to support students enrolled in the online undergraduate programs.

**h. If relevant, information on other required approvals to offer the program beyond the Board of Regents (such as accreditation bodies, including the Higher Learning Commission [HLC])**

No additional approvals are required.

**i. Evidence of how the new program aligns with the institutional mission, strategic plan, and existing academic degree program array**

In several respects, this proposal, like the College of Letters & Science itself, can be traced back to the original 1848 act establishing the University of Wisconsin, to the principle that practical programs benefit from integrated study of the arts and sciences, and that a broad education should be widely accessible to those who want it. Today, that animating idea lives on in the UW-Madison Mission Statement,<sup>1</sup> where the core component of the institutional purpose is to “improve the quality of life for all.” This is to be achieved through a broad array of activities, including several that resonate with the proposal to create and offer a new online degree program and major. The Bachelor of Liberal Studies and its majors will contribute to the university’s broad and balanced array of academic programs; promote and strengthen interdisciplinary study; and serve society by meeting continuing educational needs. The major in Applied Social Science, in particular, will strengthen students’ cultural understanding, their understanding of social, political, economic, and technological change through research and service. The programs reflect appreciation for, and commitment to, the ideals of a pluralistic, multiracial, open and democratic society. The ability to flexibly transcend disciplinary boundaries is essential to the study of the liberal arts and sciences. Thus these programs can be seen as a modern incarnation of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s abiding interest in increasing access to “the beneficent influence” of the university, to improve the lives of people living and working in and beyond Wisconsin.

Given this fundamental alignment with the university’s mission and with the core strengths of the college, it is easy to discern that the proposal to create the BLS and the major in Applied Social Science also reinforces the UW-Madison strategic framework. Specifically, the proposed programs will “extend the educational mission to Wisconsin and the world” with new technology, and “leverage our distinctive interdisciplinary strength to address complex problems in the state and world.”

The BLS will also complement the array of general baccalaureate degrees offered by the College of Letters & Science. These programs serve students seeking a traditional “science intensive” Bachelor of Science or “language, humanities, and humanistic social sciences intensive” Bachelor of Arts, both of which are coupled with majors that require deep study in a discipline, often preparatory to application to further advanced study in a field. Although these degrees and majors have served the college well for more than a century and provide excellent preparation for graduate and professional education, most of these programs minimize interdisciplinary study, emphasizing instead the boundaries of traditional fields with connections between fields found only in service to each other.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wisc.edu/about/mission/>

A few interdisciplinary majors focus on methods or topics that connect fields, but few adopt a thoroughly integrative design where important questions are approached from a variety of perspectives in complementary and informative ways. This program therefore affords L&S an opportunity to pursue an approach to liberal education that encourages problem-centered learning that integrates breadth of study throughout the degree and major.

#### **j. A link to the institution's academic strategic plan**

<https://chancellor.wisc.edu/strategicplan2/>

#### **k. Need for the new program**

In 2016, the Institute for Research in Higher Education predicted that by 2020, 62% of jobs in Wisconsin would require a postsecondary degree.<sup>2</sup> Report after report confirm that higher education is tied to the economic prosperity of the state and of the region, and that access to baccalaureate education is a lever that can address barriers to economic equity, stability, and mobility.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> There is little doubt that access to a bachelor's degree will make a difference to these individuals, to their opportunities, and to the state.

Analyses conducted for the university identified over 800,000 Wisconsin residents with some college but no degree, with over 39,000 realistically motivated to complete a baccalaureate degree. Wisconsin's neighboring states have 28.6 million residents with an adult education population profile similar to Wisconsin's. The addressable market of Upper Midwest residents with some college credit but no bachelor's degree is approximately 11 million. Online undergraduate degree programs provide greater access for these students, particularly working adults and those with caregiving responsibilities. A market analysis found that the market for a generalist "liberal studies" degree/major (coupled with majors in various areas of the Social Sciences) is large and anticipated to grow.

Analysis of similar programs in peer institutions indicates that generalist liberal-arts and science degrees like the one described herein are highly sought-after by this population of learners. Of the six degree categories identified in peer institutions by the Division of Continuing Studies, this program can address three: technology, sciences, and liberal studies.

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<sup>2</sup> Institute for Research on Higher Education. 2016. *College Affordability Diagnosis: Wisconsin*. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for Research on Higher Education, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania. <http://www2.gse.upenn.edu/irhe/affordability-diagnosis>.

<sup>3</sup> Berger, Noah and Peter Fisher. 2013 (August 22). "A Well-Educated Workforce is Key to State Prosperity." Retrieved from the Economic Policy Institute website: <https://www.epi.org/publication/states-educationproductivity-growth-foundations/>

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein, Jared and Ben Spielberg. 2015 (June 5). "Inequality Matters." Retrieved from *The Atlantic* website: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/06/what-matters-inequality-or-opportunity/393272/>

<sup>5</sup> Chetty, Raj, John Friedman, Emmanuel Saez, Nicholas Turner, and Danny Yagan. 2017. "Mobility Report Cards: The Role of Colleges in Intergenerational Mobility." Retrieved from the New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/>.

Colleagues across the UW System have already been rising to the challenge of extending access to baccalaureate-level online education to citizens of the state, nation, and world, and have pursued a variety of avenues for doing so. The innovative UW Flex program affords students access to online baccalaureate degrees; however, that program is distinguished from the proposed UW-Madison BLS in that it incorporates procedures to allow credit for life experience, which is not a feature the UW-Madison program will afford its students.

The UW System eCampus (Extended Campus) website lists 72 baccalaureate-level programs available online. Many of these programs focus on specific careers or career pathways (e.g., nursing, business administration, criminal justice), while others are technical in nature. Some are online versions of their residential bachelor of arts or science degree programs (with modification to allow for online completion) coupled with discipline-focused undergraduate majors (e.g., UW-Milwaukee's BA/BS which can be completed with History, Political Science, Jewish Studies, Psychology, or Sociology majors).

Only a few UW System programs appear to be general liberal studies programs designed to serve the audience demographics and preferences identified in the UW-Madison market research, and offered via distance delivery. UW-Whitewater allows online students to complete a BA/BS degree with a Liberal Studies major; their students complete requirements across broad categories encompassing skills, content, and experience (internships and travel study). UW-Parkside offers a BA with a major in Liberal Studies that is designed as a "transfer friendly" online degree completion program. Only UW-Oshkosh offers a Bachelor in Liberal Studies, and within that degree program offers only one major (Liberal Studies). Each of these programs has been designed to accommodate (or even require) a significant number of transfer credits. Each delivers a general program of study of contemporary issues, communication and leadership skills, and (as UW-Oshkosh's program notes) "work-life balance in American society." Program materials emphasize the ability to accommodate learners who are balancing life demands outside of school. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics suggests these programs have an audience: they awarded a combined total of 90 degrees in 2018-19.

A number of UW System institutions offer majors in Social Studies; however, these programs are associated with programs in Education rather than with the study of the liberal arts and sciences in the context of a Bachelor of Liberal Studies.

The proposed UW-Madison Bachelor of Liberal Studies program will therefore enhance the breadth and depth of online baccalaureate-level programs offered across the UW System, filling a niche intended to balance study across the liberal arts and sciences with a modest number of integrative majors that will bring focus and context to students' foundational studies and prior college-level coursework. The proposed major in applied social science will combine the methods, tools, and habits of mind that are brought to bear in the study of societies and pressing social questions with analytical skills and effective communication and presentation to help students understand critical issues in the world around them, to act purposefully on what they know. The BLS with a major in Applied Social Science will promote the UW-Madison brand of the Wisconsin Experience, facilitating real-world application of informed understanding to questions, issues, problems, and solutions relevant to the lives students lead, .

**l. A list of the program faculty who are central to the planning process**

BLS Working Group

*Convened by Eric Wilcots, Dean*

*Co-chairs:*

Elaine Klein, Associate Dean for Academic Planning  
Greg Downey, Associate Dean for Social Science, and Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, and of Information

*Faculty Working Group:*

Dorothea Salo, Distinguished Faculty Associate, the Information School  
Kristen Shook Slack, Professor and Director, Sandra Rosenbaum School of Social Work  
Clark Landis, Professor of Chemistry  
Sarah Thal, Professor of History

*Consultants to the Committee:*

Cal Bergman, Associate Dean, L&S Student Academic Affairs  
James Montgomery, Associate Dean for Fiscal Initiatives, Professor of Sociology  
Kelley Harris, Director, Cross-College Advising Services  
Mike Pflieger, Assistant Dean and Director, L&S Academic Information Management  
Rebekah Paré, Associate Dean for L&S Career Initiatives and Director, SuccessWorks  
Shirin Malekpour, Associate Dean for Teaching & Learning Administration

Partner Departments/Programs and Faculty

**m. Letters of support or concurrence**

Will depend on answer to l.