The University of Wisconsin Colleges Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences Degree Completion Program: A Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) Informed and Inspired Degree Program

Overview

The need for a University of Wisconsin Colleges (UW Colleges) applied liberal arts baccalaureate degree was identified in the early years of the twenty-first century by a public-private task force, the Commission on Enhancing the Mission of the UW Colleges, charged with examining the UW Colleges mission in the context of the Wisconsin Idea. Planning for the proposed UW Colleges Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) degree-completion program began immediately following the Commission on Enhancing the Mission of the UW College’s work in 2007. Over the subsequent five years, a shared governance planning process occurred within the institution and the UW Colleges Office of Academic and Student Affairs worked with the UW System Administration Office of Academic and Student Affairs and other institutions of the UW System in a collaborative planning process required of all new programs. In June 2011, the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System (Board of Regents) unanimously approved a new mission for the UW Colleges and unanimously approved the authorization of the UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program. In the years since the Board of Regents approval, units throughout the UW Colleges have been involved in developing, implementing, and refining academic, policy, and functional elements essential for this degree program. The BAAS degree completion program was officially launched in fall 2013.

The Process

The UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program process began with the Commission on Enhancing the Mission of the UW Colleges chaired by two business leaders (one a former regent of the Board of Regents) and populated with elected local and state officials, private citizens, and faculty, staff and administrators from the UW Colleges and other UW System institutions. The commission’s December 2006 report noted that the UW Colleges served the largest population of returning adult students in the UW System and that this population was increasing in the UW Colleges while decreasing in UW
System institutions as a whole. The commission recommended the UW Colleges should be granted restricted baccalaureate degree granting authority to serve place-bound, working adults in areas served by the UW Colleges campuses. In 2008, two different UW Colleges task forces began work on this concept: the UW Colleges Faculty Task Force and the Entitlement to Plan Task Force.

The work of a UW Colleges Faculty Task Force provided the framework for an applied liberal arts baccalaureate degree. This framework then became the basis for a UW Colleges Entitlement to Plan proposal that was adopted by the UW Colleges Entitlement to Plan Task Force and then submitted to UW System Administration. Upon approval of the second version of the Request for Entitlement to Plan document to UW System Administration, the UW Colleges was granted permission to submit a Request for Authorization to Implement document.

With the unanimous support of the UW Colleges shared governance bodies, the Office of Academic and Student Affairs submitted a request for approval of a change in the UW Colleges mission to the Board of Regents in June 2010 for a first reading and initial review. The Authorization to Implement the UW Colleges Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree was also submitted for initial review at the June 2010 meeting of the Board of Regents. The authorization document outlined the LEAP inspired and informed 60-credit baccalaureate degree-completion program curriculum of 30 credits to be offered by the UW Colleges and 30 credits to be offered by University of Wisconsin System partner institutions.

As noted above, in 2008 the BAAS Faculty Task Force was convened with a charge to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of students, communities, and businesses in Wisconsin. Within the charge to the task force was the following statement: “the proposed degree shall meet the LEAP objectives as outlined in the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) LEAP National Report, *College Learning for the New Global Century.*”

The BAAS degree meets the LEAP objectives as outlined in the AAC&U LEAP National Report, *College Learning for the New Global Century.* In the table below, the Faculty Task Force summarized the ways in which the UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program meets each particular LEAP outcome. In addition, the creation of a Capstone Senior Seminar demonstrates that BAAS graduates have met the LEAP objectives to be employees who can be trained to meet the specific needs of particular employers and to be effective local, national, and global citizens.
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<th>LEAP Outcome</th>
<th>BAAS Degree Components</th>
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| Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Natural World | • The World in the 21st Century  
• Breadth Requirements  
• Upper Division Electives |
| Practical and Intellectual Skills and Integrative Learning | • Creative Problem Solving  
• Internship and Service Learning Courses  
• Professional Experiences (incl. Credit for Prior Learning)  
• Upper Division Courses with Applied Studies and Professional Experiences degree designators  
• Capstone Senior Seminar |
| Personal and Social Responsibility Outcomes | Aspects of the Global Studies, Intellectual Skills and Professional Experience components such as Service Learning, Internships, and Upper Division Applied Studies courses |

The Program

The UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program deliberately builds on the rich tradition established in the institution’s century-old history of preparing largely first generation, traditional age college students and, especially in the past 30 years, adult learners, for successful completion of baccalaureate degrees. The student-centered, dynamic, high-quality liberal arts curriculum of the UW Colleges Associate of Arts and Science (AAS) degree has served as the foundation for transferring students into a wide array of baccalaureate degree programs at a range of universities and colleges.

The UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program is centered on 21st century competencies and skills that people need to become productive, contributing participants in the local community, particularly as local communities become increasingly tied to the global economy. The degree aligns the work of the AAC&U in that it supports the college experience with skills employers indicate employees need in such an economy: knowledge of other peoples and cultures, knowledge of global structures and processes important to making good business decisions, the ability to work across cultures, to think critically, problem-solve intelligently and communicate effectively, and the opportunity to engage in experiential learning (please see the AAC&U’s “Raising the Bar: Employers’ Views on College Learning in the Wake of the Economic Downturn, (January 2010) and an accompanying AAC&U chart, “Percentage of Employers Who Want to ‘Place More Emphasis’ on LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes”). The essential elements of the UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program are
summarized in the core principles that follow. The core principles are directly aligned with the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.

The UW Colleges BAAS degree addresses the need for baccalaureate degree-seeking students to deepen their critical thinking, creative, and analytical skills; to develop a better understanding of other peoples and cultures and a knowledge of how to consider contemporary and enduring problems in a global perspective; and to acquire specific workplace skills through a blend of classroom and experiential learning. This unique degree-completion program provides place-bound adult learners an opportunity to develop creative and problem solving skills appropriate in different milieus for different challenges and tasks. It draws on faculty expertise that comes from scholarly traditions and knowledge that comes from professional development and practice. It cultivates an understanding of cultural diversity and of the links between the local and the global.

The core principles of the degree are to provide adult learners with:

1. A demonstrated knowledge of global systems and processes and the ways workplaces and local communities are enmeshed in global networks;
2. A demonstrated understanding of other lands, peoples, and cultures that foster cross-cultural communication and an ability to work in cross-cultural environments;
3. Cognitive, analytical, critical thinking, research, decision-making, and creative skills that can be applied to problem solving processes in their professional and community lives;
4. Demonstrated written, oral, and visual communication skills critical to professional and community settings;
5. Structured and reflective experiential learning in an area associated with workplace issues and local community needs;
6. An ability to identify and implement a creative/research capstone project and present the results at a forum or other public venue; and
7. An ability to work collaboratively, resolve conflicts, and be effective leaders in their workplaces and in their local communities.

As with the AAS degree, faculty members are responsible for the content, development, instruction, and assessment of the four curricular components of the UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program. Academic department chairs work collaboratively with campus-based faculty, campus executive officers/deans, associate deans, the Senate BAAS Curriculum Committee, the Senate Assessment Committee, and the Office of Academic and Student Affairs to carry out these curricular processes.

Assessment of BAAS Degree Student Learning Outcomes

In the spring of 2014, the UW Colleges appointed a faculty coordinator to lead the assessment of the BAAS degree completion program and to work closely with the UW Colleges Senate BAAS Assessment Committee. Over the course of the next year, the committee worked diligently to determine how best to assess the student learning outcomes of the BAAS degree curriculum.
In the summer of 2015, the Senate BAAS Assessment Committee decided to adopt the AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) Rubrics to assess the BAAS degree learning outcomes, proficiencies, and competencies. The committee identified seven VALUE Rubrics that are to be the main on-going focus of Senate BAAS Assessment Committee: Critical Thinking, Global Learning, Inquiry and Analysis, Integrative Learning, Quantitative Literacy, Reading, and Written Communication. The rubrics used for course assessment for the 2016-2017 academic year will be Global Learning, Critical Thinking, and Written Communication.

Currently, the Senate BAAS Assessment Committee is mapping the selected VALUE Rubrics to specific proficiency and competency areas within each of the core components of the BAAS degree: Global Studies, Cognitive Skills, Integrative Learning and the Senior Capstone Seminar. Additionally, the committee is working to identify how the VALUE Rubrics can be applied to specific courses with the Global Studies and Cognitive Skills area designations.

Conclusion

The UW Colleges bachelor-level degree completion program was built on a vision foreseen by a commission of local leaders and educators nearly ten years ago for place-bound, working adults from the communities that support the UW Colleges campuses. The BAAS degree completion program is designed to address Wisconsin’s future labor force needs while allowing place-bound adult learners to maintain their employment and control long-term indebtedness.

The UW Colleges BAAS degree completion program is built on the foundation of the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes. From its inception, the BAAS degree has focused on providing students with a high quality degree completion experience rooted in Global Studies, Cognitive Skills, and Professional Experience gained through service learning, community learning, and internships.

Supporting Materials

- The BAAS Proficiency/Competency VALUE Rubric spreadsheet
- Video where a student discusses his BAAS degree completion program experience.
- The BAAS degree completion website