

Notice of Intent – B.A. in General Letters

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

March 2023

College of Letters and Science Faculty Document 1058a
NOI to accompany L&S Faculty Document 1058
March 10, 2023

Name of the proposed degree: Bachelor of Arts in General Letters

Institutional Setting: Degree awarded by the College of Letters and Science

Mode of delivery: In person, hybrid, and online courses

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Program Description and Learning Outcomes

UW-Milwaukee's College of Letters & Science is proposing a new degree, the Bachelor of Arts in General Letters, to serve two groups of students: Traditional students who have amassed 120 credits but have faced a significant obstacle in completing a major, and returning adult students who have earned some college credit but who have not yet completed a first undergraduate degree. L&S has decades of success in educating college students in traditional programs, with thousands of undergraduates having completed BA or BS degrees in the College's 46 majors in recent years. The proposed program aims to broaden access to a UW-Milwaukee liberal arts degree to students who have needs that are not met by traditional programs, by recovering and updating the L&S tradition of a General degree. L&S had a B.A. General Curriculum degree from 1971 to 1976 (created in L&S Faculty Document 82A, April 1970). This degree consisted of 120 credits, with 90 credits in L&S and 45 of those credits in upper-division (300-level and above) courses. There were no other requirements. This degree was eliminated in 1976 (L&S Faculty Document 228, December 1976).

The proposed version of the B.A. General Curriculum degree would be more structured than the original version, as it would preserve the L&S breadth requirement and international requirement. Further, when the B.A. General Curriculum existed, there were no UWM General Education Requirements for L&S students to satisfy, but the proposed B.A. in General Letters would expect UWM General Education Requirements to be completed.

Most current L&S B.A requirements would be retained in the BA in General Letters: like other L&S bachelor's degrees, the B.A. in General Letters will require students to complete 120 college credits, which include General Education Requirements; the L&S requirements in breadth and international coursework; and at least 45 upper-division credits with at least 15 of those credits in residence at UWM. It would diverge from the regular B.A. by accepting second-semester proficiency in a language other than English (i.e. the GER requirement) but require additional 300-level and above courses. Also, students completing the B.A. General Letters degree would not complete a major. They may complete one or more minors, certificates, and micro-credentials, to demonstrate their skills in one or more areas of focus, but none of those is required.

Thus the degree consists of 120 credits to meet the following requirements:

- Completion of UWM GER
- 90 credits in the College of Letters & Science, with at least 12 credits in Humanities, at least 12 credits in Social Science, and at least 12 credits in Natural Science (L&S breadth requirement)
- At least 45 of those 90 credits must be in L&S courses numbered 300 or above, at least 15 credits of which must be in residence at UWM
- Completion of the L&S International requirement
- Achievement of a cumulative GPA of 2.0

The BA in General Letters will provide students with a more flexible curriculum and accommodate transfer credits better than the existing traditional BA and BS degrees the College offers, while maintaining the College's standards via the requirement of challenging upper-division coursework. Courses that transfer in with L&S equivalents will count towards the 90 credits in the College. Only 15 credits must be completed in residence. Students will be able to choose from in person, hybrid, and online courses to fit their schedules.

Upon completion of the program, students will:

- Demonstrate oral and written communication skills. Students will be able to communicate clearly and adapt content and style for different audiences.
- Demonstrate information literacy skills. Students will be able to locate, evaluate, and responsibly use and share information relevant to a problem at hand.
- Employ analytic methods from at least two disciplines to explore, argue, and/or analyze course materials.
- Demonstrate self-awareness regarding learning. Students will be able to evaluate their own learning across subjects.
- Compare and contrast subject areas/disciplines and make connections among ideas.

Resources

No new resources are required for this program. The program will draw on the strength of UWM, especially L&S, faculty to deliver the program. No additional tenure/tenure track faculty are required to launch the program. College of Letters & Science advisors and the L&S Office of Curriculum and Governance will support the program's needs for advising, assessment, and oversight. College advisors will encourage students in this degree program to use the UW-Milwaukee Career Planning and Resource Center to be prepared to leverage their bachelor's degree upon completion.

Required approvals beyond the Board of Regents

No additional approvals are required, for UW-Milwaukee is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission to offer in person, hybrid, and online programs.

Alignment with UWM's guiding values and institutional mission

The proposed program responds to the following aspects of the [UWM Vision, Values, and Mission Statement](#):

We value:

- Opportunities for open inquiry to support the positive transformation of individuals (students, faculty, and staff), institutions, and communities.
- Diversity in all of its definitions, including who we are, how we think, and what we do.

University of Wisconsin System Mission Statement

- To serve and stimulate society by developing in students heightened intellectual, cultural, and humane sensitivities

The B.A. in General Letters offers a degree option for students facing barriers to completing a major for the regular B.A. or B.S. As such it permits students to pursue open inquiry through a broad general education with a balance of coursework across the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. It will support the positive transformation of students by creating a path to degree completion for traditional students facing obstacles to completing a major, and foster diversity by offering a completion degree for non-traditional students.

Need for the program

Market demand

Research for UW-Milwaukee Online shows there is demand nationally for completion degrees, especially when the degree can be completed online. The only competitor in the region is University of Wisconsin – Parkside with its Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies Major, which is online only, and has greater limitations regarding entering students (minimum 60 credits on entry, and 60 credits must be taken in residence). The proposed degree will serve students seeking a completion degree with greater flexibility than the UW-Parkside program and with options for online and in-person classes. Further, students seeking specific professional skills will be able to complete existing certificates or minors, or potential micro-credentials, such as Quantitative Data Analysis, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, Death Investigation, Digital Arts and Culture, Spanish for Health Professionals, or Geographic Information Sciences. The proposed degree will also serve the existing demand for such a degree from current UW-Milwaukee students, as discussed in the next section.

Student demand

Over the past decade it has become clear that approximately ten to fifteen students every year find themselves unable to complete their selected major in L&S despite having done most of the coursework:

- A student may struggle to identify a major that is appropriate for them, then amass credits and fulfill GER and L&S requirements except for the major.
- A student may need to repeat a class to achieve a certain grade or to meet the required GPA but cannot repeat again after three attempts.
- A student in either situation may then select a new/different major but be unable to complete that in under 165 credits.

Many students facing such difficulties have in the past decade turned to the Committee Interdisciplinary Major (“CI Major”) to complete their degrees. The CI Major oversight process has been changed to maintain its interdisciplinarity. Thus for students facing the kinds of obstacles listed above, another pathway to completing a solid degree in the College is needed.

Many returning students face similar challenges in that they may have amassed dozens of credits but cannot find a major that is appropriate for them, or their classes transferring in do not work for an existing L&S major. The proposed degree would be flexible enough to allow them to transfer in many courses and follow those up with upper-division courses in L&S that meet their needs and interests.

Similar programs in the system and the region

Within the UW system there are only two degrees that are similar to the proposed degree, and they serve different markets. The UW-Madison Bachelor in Liberal Studies: Applied Social Sciences is similarly broader than a traditional major, but is a social sciences major, and is fully online. UW-Parkside offers a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies, but it is also only online. The proposed degree aims to serve both students looking for a mix of in person and online courses and those seeking a fully online degree, and therefore will serve not only fully online students but also those in the Milwaukee area interested in some in-person classes.

As the proposed degree is a general BA, it has been developed to resemble similar general degrees at UW-Milwaukee’s peer institutions – that is, urban public universities with missions that include both research and access. Most of these are in their L&S equivalent but at least one is in a College of Professions and Liberal Arts. Many of the programs have a distribution requirement – that is, students must take a certain number of credits (e.g. 12 or 18) from different divisions, or cannot take more than a maximum number of credits in one subject. Examples include:

- University of Alabama: Bachelor's of General Studies (BS)
- University of Cincinnati: BA in Liberal Arts and Bachelor's in Interdisciplinary Science (BIS)
- Cleveland State University: Bachelor's of Liberal Studies
- University of Houston: BA of Liberal Arts
- Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis: Bachelor of General Studies
- University of Memphis: Bachelor's of Liberal Studies, Bachelor's of Professional Studies, Bachelor's of Interdisciplinary Studies – in School of Professions and Liberal Arts
- Virginia Commonwealth University: BS in Science (interdisciplinary/general)

Some of these programs are located in the Midwest, but none serve Wisconsin and neighboring states.

The proposed UW-Milwaukee BA in General Letters is distinct from other programs in the region and the country, in that it:

- Builds on the already-existing College of Letters & Science array of both in person and online courses to meet students' needs and interests
- Serves at least two student markets: students already at UW-Milwaukee with unique challenges to completing a major, and transfer and returning students seeking a 'completion' degree, all while maintaining standards through certain L&S requirements
- Allows greater flexibility than a traditional major with the option to specialize by completing one or more minors, certificates, and/or micro-credentials
- Provides access for more students, whether in the Milwaukee area or at a distance, to engage with a major research university
- Offers a general degree capable of competing with those at other U.S. institutions