

Brigham Young University–Hawaii
University Studies Program
Program Review
2013

I. Program Overview

The concept of a degree program designed to develop undergraduate degrees tailored to the specific needs of individual students is not new. Throughout academia, colleges and universities are recognizing the importance of providing students with degrees designed to enable them to obtain gainful employment following graduation in a career field of their choosing. Brigham Young University–Hawaii’s Bachelor of Science in University Studies Degree program provides exactly that, an opportunity for graduates to utilize their academic credentials in successfully obtaining gainful employment following graduation.

Program Outcomes

Outcomes for the University Studies students have been identified and listed within the university catalog, and are provided below.

1. Demonstrate competence in core competencies (quantitative skills, civic responsibility, and ability to work with others).
2. Demonstrate ability to work with others of diverse backgrounds in academic and professional settings.
3. Demonstrate breadth in the areas of social, political, technical and scientific knowledge expected of those seeking skilled positions in the workforce.
4. Communicate proficiently, in both speech and writing, in academic and professional settings.
5. Use critical thinking to solve problems.
6. Demonstrates proficiency in a variety of software useful in professional environments.
7. Learn independently and understand how to learn new skills that will be required of them in their future endeavors.
8. Be prepared for work, citizenship, and a fulfilling life.

Program Background

The Bachelors of Science Degree in University Studies was developed in 2009 with the goal of assisting students whose academic needs did not follow the more traditional undergraduate degree programs. Currently housed within the College of Human Development, the program specifically addresses the needs of two main groups of students. The first group of students are those, who, later in their academic pursuits, for one reason or another, found that seeking previously declared majors was untenable and wished to pursue a different type of academic program. The second group consists of students who have completed a majority of coursework in a given area, but were unable to complete their degree program for a variety of reasons. Having the ability to custom design a degree program meeting their academic and occupational needs

provides these students with opportunities often unavailable without a university degree. Using completed coursework, and rigorous academic “clusters” developed and approved by the faculty of each of the University’s colleges, the B.S. in University Studies degree plan is tailored to each individual student. Upon completion of the program, students receive a University Studies Degree with a focus in one or more academic areas.

Since its inception, several issues were raised regarding the program. Since this type of program is relatively new in many universities, most faculty were, and many may still be somewhat cautious about accepting a new academic degree. A few faculty members openly opposed the program with the primary concern being with what some faculty members described as lack of academic rigor. During open discussions regarding the program, some individuals expressed concerns that the program was like a sort of consolation prize for students who could not meet the scholastic requirements required for other academic areas. They could still get a degree based on their coursework, but rather than getting a degree in a traditional program, their degree would be in University Studies with a “focus” in one or more minors, certificates, and/or clusters or courses. Additionally, concern was expressed regarding the lack of faculty oversight, and that enrollment into the program was basically accomplished through an academic advisor without faculty input or direction. In response to these concerns, and as suggested in the 2012 Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Report, several changes have been made which have helped make the program even more responsive to the needs of the individual student. Training for the academic advisors has been conducted, which has helped ensure that all of the academic advisors process potential applicant’s files in a consistent and uniform manner. Particular attention has been given to the assignment of the capstone project which in the infancy of the program could have been taken as part of previous coursework. A strict policy has been established that requires the capstone project to be part of the final year of instruction, and preferably during the final semester before graduation. Regarding academic rigor, the development of academic “clusters” by various departments provides students with definitive courses that the student must take as part of the student’s academic program. These clusters maintain the academic rigor essential for any university degree program, and provides the students with a definitive plan of courses needed for completion of their degree. Additionally, faculty oversight has been initiated providing students and academic advisors with a specific contact who reviews each application and remains available to the students for counseling and program development.

Program Admission

Students seeking admission into the University Studies program must do the following:

1. Complete an application for admission into the University Studies program which details coursework that the student has taken, and will take in the future to successfully complete the program.
2. Meet with the academic advisor (from the area of primary emphasis) to create a MAP and finalize the application.
3. Meet with a faculty member to design and plan the capstone experience; the Program Lead will then sign off on the capstone plan.
4. Submit completed proposal and all required attachments to the assigned academic advisor,

who will forward it to the Dean of the College of Human Development for final approval.

Major Requirements

Students completing a degree in University Studies will complete:

1. A minimum of 120 semester hours of earned credit, including all of the General Education and Religious Education requirements.
2. A minimum of 30 semester hours in residence at BYU-Hawaii.
3. The completion of a minimum of 28 credit hours of primary focus in one or more preapproved academic areas (i.e. minors, emphases, or clusters).
4. A selection of at least 12 credits in career preparation that support the primary focus.
5. A cumulative GPA of at least 2.0.
6. No more than 6.0 hours of “D” credits within the major.
7. A minimum of 15 upper-division credit hours, excluding GE (300 or 400-level classes).
8. The completion of a “capstone experience,” typically during the student’s final semester.

Capstone Experience

The capstone experience is taken for credit typically during the student’s final semester such as an independent study course (390R), internship (399R), or student research (496R) depending on its nature. The capstone experience must:

1. be clearly relevant to the proposed curriculum and it must integrate areas of academic emphasis.
2. approximate the academic rigor of a senior-level capstone course.
3. be approved in advance by the Dean of the College of Human Development and the report/results evaluated by that Dean.
4. receive all necessary approvals before it is undertaken. No capstone experience will be approved “after the fact”.
5. be fully described in a written proposal. The description should include the details of what will be done, how the experience will be evaluated including who will evaluate the experience (department chair and site supervisor are appropriate).

II. Assessing Program Quality

Assessment of program quality was undertaken in four (4) specific areas; (1) student satisfaction, (2) success of program graduates, (3) academic rigor, (4) and enrollment and graduation data for the University Studies Program. Each of these areas are discussed individually, as well as how they cumulatively relate to one another.

Student Satisfaction

Data concerning student satisfaction has been obtained from a survey sent to graduates of the University Studies program. While 220 students have graduated from BYU-Hawaii with the degree, the number of students responding to the survey were N=26. Students were asked a variety of questions ranging from the quality of instruction to the validity of the program in

helping graduates obtain gainful employment. Responses were varied, and reviewing the data from the survey indicated that 72.8% of the graduates were satisfied with the courses that they took, and 76.2% indicated satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the major. 61.9% of the graduates expressed a feeling of strong support from faculty. Faculty mentoring was favorable with 68% indicating that the quality of mentoring they received was satisfactory. 68.2% of the graduates also indicated that their academic advisor was helpful as they progressed through their major.

Negative comments concerning the degree were focused primarily in the lack of faculty support in finding employment following graduation (40.9%) and the inability to discuss career plans with faculty members (27.3%). Regarding whether or not graduates would recommend the University Studies program to prospective students looking for an excellent undergraduate experience, the results were split with 45.5% indicating that they would recommend the program, and 27.3% indicating that they would not.

Qualitative responses ranged from “University Studies was the best thing that ever happened to me,” and “University Studies allowed me to finish quickly, which I needed to do since my husband was going to be attending graduate school,” to “My experience at BYUH prior to my last semester was great but I feel like the University gave up on me,” and “I cannot express enough my displeasure and disappointment at the administration at BYU-Hawaii for ever instituting such an ill-advised “degree program.”

It should be mentioned that 82.3% of those responding to the survey graduated prior to the changes that were made since April of 2013 in response to the 2012 WASC Report.

Success of Program Graduates

Determining the success of program graduates must be viewed using more than just one lens. Students seeking employment in a given area following graduation is most often the ultimate goal for our graduates. Other students are seeking to obtain any degree from an institution of higher education located within the United States, and for many international students, receiving such a degree is considered prestigious in their home countries. Finally, students obtaining a University Studies degree find that it is much different than receiving a degree in one of the more traditional areas. Consideration must be given to all of these situations, particularly when one recognizes that the Bachelor’s of Science in University Studies is often obtained when a student is unable to pursue the more traditional degree program.

Responses from the N=26 surveyed graduates indicated that 55.6% of those responding to the survey selected the University Studies option during their senior year, and another 22.2% applying for the program during their junior year. 57.1% of the graduates were female. 41.2% of the graduates indicated that their home area was Hawaii, 29.4% were from Asia and the Pacific, and 29.4% were from the mainland United States.

54.5% of the graduates responding to the survey indicated that if they “had to do it all over again” indicated that they would choose a different major, but that they would still attend BYU-Hawaii for the undergraduate education. When specifically asked whether or not the University Studies

program provided strong preparation for their current occupation, 27.3% indicated that it did not. Positive responses indicated that 18.2% somewhat agreed that the program provided them with the preparation they required while another 36.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they had been prepared for their current occupation.

An additional aspect of the University Studies program deals with students who were enrolled in the University in the past, who did not complete their degree program, but would like to be able to finish a degree, any degree, as quickly as possible. The University Studies program was designed to reach these students as well. Positive responses included “able to finish quickly – is a filler degree if your credits don’t add up right and are spread over several different areas.” Another graduate wrote that “Many students who’ve gone to college in other countries can transfer credits and graduate quickly with that degree.” Finally, one student summed up the entire program with a “catered A-La-Carte learning to suit the individual goals of the student.”

Academic Rigor

The subject of academic rigor has been an important issue for the administration, faculty and students alike. Since many of the University Studies participants were previously enrolled in majors where their academic success was questionable, some individuals voiced concern that students having the opportunity to change majors late in their academic programs were receiving undergraduate degrees that lacked the academic rigor that is an essential component of a degree from an accredited university.

In response to these concerns, university administration requested each academic department to generate a list of “clusters”, that is, groups of specific courses selected by the faculty which would insure that the students enrolled in the University Studies program had undertaken courses that were (1) academically rigorous, (2) would provide an academic focus for students in a specific field, and (3) were recognized by the administration, faculty, and occupational entities outside of the university. In April 2013, a list of acceptable “clusters” was approved by the administration and faculty and these clusters were included in the university catalog. Additionally, an important consideration regarding the academic rigor is indicated in the major requirements section of this report. Specific grade points averages must be adhered to, and students who have more than “6.0 hours of “D” credits within the major” will not qualify for the degree. Strictly speaking, not everyone will be able to qualify for, nor graduate with the University Studies degree.

Enrollment and Graduation Data

The enrollment process into the University Studies program is initiated when a student meets with their academic advisor for an evaluation of their academic progress in the major of their choice. In conjunction with the academic advisor, the student’s options are considered and a plan is developed, one option of which may be to initiate the application process for acceptance into the University Studies program. This typically occurs when the student has completed 90 hours of academic credit. The student is then advised to submit to the faculty member assigned oversight of the program, a proposal in which the student explains in detail their academic and occupational goals. Employment goals should be supported by specific academic requirements

associated with the occupation of choice, as well as employment/unemployment data from their area of residence. Upon reception of the proposal, the faculty member will review the academic degree plan and the proposal, and if warranted, request additional information or clarification of portions of the proposal. The faculty member will meet with the student prior to entry into the program, and discuss the proposal and the proposed degree plan with the student. Following the meeting, the program coordinator for the University Studies program will accept or reject the application. If the proposal is accepted, the coordinator will approve the plan, and forward the application to the Dean of the College of Human Development where the University Studies program is currently housed. Once the program has been approved by the Dean of the College of Human Development, the approved plan is forwarded to the Registrar's Office for processing. All students requesting admission to the University Studies degree program are required to complete this process prior to acceptance. In cases where the students is not accepted into the program, consideration for an Associate's Degree is usually made.

Since 2009, a total of 220 students have graduated with a degree in the University Studies program. These 220 students represent approximately 6% of the total students graduating from BYU-H between 2009 and 2013. 122, or 55 percent of these students are from the United States, and the remaining 45 percent from countries primarily in Asia, Micronesia, Pacific Islands, Polynesia, and Oceania. The second and third largest enrollment has been from Japan (11 percent) and Tonga (6 percent). Table 1 below provides a breakdown of program graduates since the inception of the program in 2009 until graduation in April 2013, listed by home country.

Table 1. University Studies Graduates by Home Country, 2009 – 2013

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Australia				1	
Brazil			1	1	
Bulgaria			1		
Canada				1	
China P. R.			1		1
Fiji	1	1	3	2	1
France			1	1	
French Polynesia	1				
Hong Kong			1	1	
India			1		

Table 1. University Studies Graduates by Home Country, 2009 – 2013 (cont).

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Indonesia	1	1			
Jamaica		1			
Japan		5	5	12	2
Kiribati				1	1
Korea, Republic of	1	1			
Marshall Islands		2		1	
Mongolia	1	1			
New Zealand		1	2	2	1
Peru		1			
Philippines		2	2	3	
Samoa			2	2	
Taiwan, R.O.C.		2		1	
Tonga	2	5	2	2	3
United Kingdom				1	
United States	8	21	27	42	24
Vanuatu		1			
Unknown				1	
Total	15	45	50	77	33
Grand Total	15	60	110	187	220

Source: Brigham Young University Hawaii, Institutional Research Office, October 2013

III. Program Sustainability

Program sustainability will be evaluated by examining three (3) main areas; (1) where the program is at this time, (2) the University's commitment to the program, and (3) the program's ability to meet the needs of a wide variety of students.

Where We are Now

The University Studies program committee met in January 2013 to examine the status of the program and to gauge where the program was in light of the WASC report. At the end of 2012, sixty-one (61) students were enrolled in the University Studies program. In April 2013, Thirty-three (33) of those who were enrolled graduated from the university with either an Associate's Degree, or a Bachelor's of Science in University Studies. Sixteen (16) additional students have enrolled in the program, bringing current enrollment to forty-nine (49) students, or 1.6% of the current student body. Four (4) of these students are scheduled to graduate from the university in December 2013. In total, two-hundred twenty (220) students have graduated from BYU-Hawaii with either an Associate's Degree, or a Bachelor's of Science in University Studies degree. This constitutes 6.2% of the total number of graduates from BYU-Hawaii from 2009 – 2013.

In April 2013, Department Heads from the various content areas selected more than fifty (50) specific academic groups (clusters) designed to maintain the academic rigor associated within each student's degree plans. Additionally, a faculty member was selected to function as the coordinator for the University Studies program, serving under the direction of the Dean of the College of Human Development where the degree is currently housed. A specific application procedure has been developed and is currently in use for students seeking admission into the program. Students must first meet with their Academic Advisor to determine whether or not the student should apply for admission into the University Studies program. The Academic Advisor initiates the application process by assisting the student in determining the academic area and specific coursework which the student will need to take as part of their University Studies degree. Once the student's curriculum map is completed, the applicant then generates a proposal to the program coordinator who evaluates the intended program. A description of the proposal requirements and an example of the proposal letter are provided at the end of this narrative. During evaluation of the application, the program coordinator may ask for additional information such as a more detailed proposal letter or coursework changes associated with the application itself. Once the proposal and application are approved by the program coordinator, the packet is then forwarded to the Dean of the College of Human Development for approval. When both the program coordinator and the Dean have signed the application, the student is enrolled into the University Studies program, and the completed application is then forwarded to the Registrar's Office.

University Commitment

Brigham Young University-Hawaii received initial accreditation by the Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in 1959,

and has continually maintained that accreditation. Assignment of “ownership” for the Bachelor’s of Science in University Studies is on a rotational basis, with the program being currently housed under the College of Human Development. A full-time faculty member has been appointed as the program coordinator, addressing the concerns voiced to and by the WASC visiting committee. It is the intention of BYU-Hawaii to continue to provide the University Studies option for students in unique situations.

Student Needs

Since the inception of the University Studies degree program, 3466 students have graduated from the university as a whole. During that time, 220 students, or approximately 6% of total graduates, have completed their degrees in University Studies. A breakdown of the students by place of residence, either U.S. or International, indicates that 59% of these students were from the United States, and 41% were international students. Students from 26 different countries have benefited from the University Studies program, completing Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees which may never have been finished without this program. This program certainly meets the needs of these students.

VI. Proposed Program Quality Improvement

Program growth, and improvement of program quality are two important considerations for the administration, faculty and students at BYU-Hawaii. Expectations for the University Studies Degree program are that it will continue to grow at a moderate pace, and that it will continue to meet the needs of specific students who require a four-year academic program that is specifically designed for the individual student’s needs. Five-year Program Goals and Proposed Changes and Resources are highlighted below.

Five-Year Program Goals

As with nearly all forms of change, there are voices which are contrary to the university having a University Studies Degree program whatever the circumstances. Whether due to lack of information, or simple prejudice towards something new, some people at the university level balk at virtually everything that is at all non-traditional. The University Studies program is certainly something non-traditional.

The first goal is to grow, and grow with the program. As the student body increases in size, there will also be a need to increase the number of courses approved by the different academic areas for use in the program’s clusters. Recognizing that there are literally thousands of occupations currently in existence now that have been created just within the last decade or less, it is prudent for faculty and staff to offer courses which addresses the needs of a changing job market.

The second goal for the University Studies faculty is to continue promoting the utilization of the program for those students who cannot complete a traditional degree in the amount of time provided. Whether due to academic challenges, language barriers, or whatever reason, there needs to be a program which helps students be successful in their academic endeavors.

The third goal is to continue to stress the changes in the program to members of the faculty. Initially, the concept of the University Studies Degree was met with opposition from faculty and some administrators as well. Despite changes which have been made in response to the WASC report, such as providing more academic rigor in each student's program and the selection of a faculty member to provide greater oversight, some of the faculty still view the program with caution. It is essential that faculty, staff, and administration understand and support the University Studies program, and are confident that the needs of our student body are being met. A step towards this goal was recently taken when the program coordinator was given the opportunity to address the faculty as a whole to describe the program. In addition to detailing the process for admission into the program, the report included enrollment and graduation rates, and how the university has specifically addressed the WASC and faculty concerns.

The fourth goal will be to maintain student outcomes that represent a growing and developing academic program. While current outcomes address the expectations of the current faculty and administration for those students participating in the program, as the students change and the program grows, so too should the expectations reflected within the student learner outcomes.

And finally, the university will continue to train faculty, academic advisors, and other staff in addressing the needs of the individual student. BYU-Hawaii was established with goals of training our students to have positions of leadership, and then for these graduates to return to their native homes to provide service to others.

Application Letter Expectations University Studies Program

The application letter should convey the following information:

1. Introduction – brief explanation of who you are, where you are from, what your current major is, etc.
2. Explanation – explain why your current major does not meet your current needs and expectations (why do you want to change to the Bachelor's Degree in University Studies), and how do you expect this U. S. degree will help meet your current and future needs and expectations?
3. What are your goals for the future (academics, occupationally, etc.) and how the University Studies Degree will assist you in achieving those goals?
4. How does the minor/certificate/clusters relate to each other, and how do they relate to what you intend to do following graduation?
5. Skills Set – what specific skills have you acquired in your education, and what skills do you intend to acquire as part of this academic program? How will these skills aid you in your future (academically, occupationally, personally, and professionally)

The application letter needs to convey to the faculty coordinator and academic advisors specific goals that the student wishes to accomplish through the University Studies program. The applicant needs to utilize appropriate, professional language, and she/he needs to explain why the change to a University Studies degree is in her/his best interest.

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE

Dr. John Doe
Faculty Coordinator
University Studies Program
Brigham Young University Hawaii

Dr. Doe,

My name is David Buckner, and I am in my senior year at Brigham Young University in Hawaii. At present, I have completed 103 hours towards a degree in Biology, originally intending to apply for entrance into medical school upon completion of my undergraduate program. While I have taken many courses in both biology and chemistry, I have also taken several courses in business. These were management courses that would have been helpful when I eventually started my own medical practice.

During my studies at BYU Hawaii, my academic interests have changed, and I have found that I no longer wish to be a physician, and I do not plan on entering medical school following graduation. Instead, I am planning on seeking employment in the area of pharmaceutical sales, an area where I do need a college degree, but where I do not need to have a degree in biology to obtain employment in that field.

Making the change to a degree in University Studies will allow me to complete a Bachelor's Degree much sooner than if I were to continue with my original academic track. Working with my academic advisor, we have identified academic clusters in biology and chemistry that directly support my plan to obtain a degree in University Studies. My knowledge of human anatomy and physiology, along with biology and biochemistry will be beneficial when communicating with physicians and other clients in determining which medications they will need for their patients, as well as giving me better insight as to how these pharmaceuticals will aid in the treatment of various illnesses and disease.

It is my hope that you will favorably consider my application for admission into the University Studies Program. Acceptance into University Studies will enable me to complete my degree much sooner than if I were to remain in my current track of study, and will allow me to seek and hopefully obtain employment in my area of interest. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David L. Buckner