

December 4, 2013

Program Review Team Report  
on  
**The Bachelor of Science in University Studies**  
at  
*Brigham Young University* (Laie, Hawai'i)

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**Preliminary Remarks:**

A Program Review Team, equally balanced with faculty internal and external to Brigham Young University - Hawai'i (BYUH), was convened on-site over two full days, November 21-22, 2013, to evaluate BYUH's Bachelor of Science in University Studies (BUS) program. Prior to convening, the team members were provided with extensive documentation about the university and the BUS program, generated from within BYUH as well as from the Western Association of Schools & Colleges (WASC), BYUH's accreditation association. While on site, the team was afforded extensive access to students, staff, advisors, faculty, and senior administrators. When, as happened on a few occasions, issues arose for which the review team desired further information, additional documentation and/or personnel were promptly made available to us. Everyone we interviewed seemed glad we were there and felt free to say whatever they wanted. In every way possible, BYUH gave the team all the cooperation, information and time necessary for it to complete, to all its members' satisfaction, a thorough review of the BUS program.

This marks the first time the BUS program has been subjected to a regular program review; the program is now queued in BYUH's regular cycle of periodic program reviews. The review was prompted by the expression, both formally and informally, of an overlapping set of concerns voiced by the faculty at BYUH and WASC. Their concerns related directly to the recent steep rise in BUS graduates and the appropriateness of such a state of affairs for the institution. While the BUS program had existed at BYUH for quite some time, it was, by all accounts, barely noted and only infrequently utilized prior to 2009, at which time the number of students being declared in and graduating from the program rose steadily and precipitously. For the last five years, the BUS degree has consistently appeared in the Top Ten Degrees Awarded, as listed in BYUH's Quick Facts. Although administrative changes to the program implemented earlier in 2013 have at least temporarily stemmed the tide, the relatively large number of students currently in the program continues to fuel legitimate concerns.

The immediate cause of the meteoric rise in BUS graduation numbers seems quite clear to everyone, including the review team: BYUH's implementation, in 2009, of a "9 semesters to graduate" policy. For most intents and purposes, after nine consecutive semesters in residence, if a student has not completed his or her degree program, then s/he will be required to leave BYUH without a diploma. As the BUS program was administered from 2009 thru the beginning of 2013, it afforded those students who were struggling in their declared major and close to running afoul of the "9 semesters to graduate" policy a way to complete a program of study and still receive a diploma from BYUH. The main concern, of course, was that this amounted to inflating graduation rates through what many perceived as an inferior degree, or a "degree to nowhere," something that many both inside and outside of the institution thought was not appropriate for BYUH, particularly considering its unique mission, its role in the region and its accreditation through WASC.

Over the course of their visit, the review team heard from almost everyone about the "9 semester to finish" policy. Although it was quite clear that the policy's initial implementation was the major contributing factor to the 2009-2013 spike in the program's enrollment, there were a healthy mix of opinions, from everyone we interviewed and from the team members themselves, about what the likely effects of this policy might be going forward. This ambivalence was further fueled by the team's understanding that, as it is currently administered, there now seem to be appropriate and established pathways for appeals and extensions to the policy. Given all this, and then adding in both (a) the administrative changes to the BUS program already put in effect since mid-2013, as well as a presumption that (b) the review team's recommendations will be taken to heart and implemented, the team decided, by consensus, that discussion of the "9 semester to graduate" policy with regard to the future of the BUS program beyond these preliminary remarks was not sufficiently warranted. We would, however, encourage subsequent BUS program review teams to revisit this issue.

Since it is a degree option specifically tailored to the individual needs of each particular student, and since these needs vary quite widely, several of the questions typically addressed in program reviews are not really relevant here, e.g., whether the "field" has changed and whether the major has changed apace. Besides the newly installed faculty advisor, no other faculty or resource issues are at issue, and implementation of the full suite of the review team's recommendations would have no significant organizational or financial implications for the institution. The most critical questions about the BUS concern its ongoing role within BYUH - even to the point of questioning whether it has a legitimate role - and how efficacious it is in fulfilling that role. Accordingly, we have organized this report to cover, in turn: (1) Program and Students, (2) Administration and Advising, (3) Program Requirements, and (4) Learning Outcomes and Assessment. Although a clear set of recommendations emerges over the course of the following narrative, a succinct list of them, along with several commendations, appears at the end.

One final preliminary set of remarks is in order. In the wake of WASC's Special Visit to BYUH in 2012, specifically to review the BUS program, and following the ensuing and well-documented series of meetings and correspondences with, and responses to and from, WASC, BYUH expeditiously began to implement several significant recommended changes to the BUS program. Most importantly, the program was placed under the direct oversight of a regular

faculty member and an academic dean. This was an immediate and forceful response to one of four specific requests made by WASC in the spring 2013. From then until now, the new faculty director has been working to refine, implement and promulgate responses to the other three WASC requests. Accordingly, although the review team fully understands and appreciates the uneven history of the BUS program prior to spring 2013, the focus of our report is primarily prospective, starting from the current state of affairs of the program. In a few instances, lingering residual aspects of the pre-2013 program have informed our recommendations, and we have noted this in the narrative.

With these preliminaries set out, a brief summation of the team's overall position is this: the BUS program does have a clear role to play within the institution, but in a significantly more limited way than has recently been the case; although the establishment of a new program administration structure has been a positive move to strengthen the program, further significant strides still need to be made, particularly with regard to designing and detailing both the program requirements and the summative assessment of learning outcomes. Further progress in both of these areas will require a broader conversation and commitment among the BYU professorate, manifested in a faculty-led steering committee for the BUS program that will give the program a more specific shape and character as well as give the program's director more support and guidance. In short, the team concurs with the assessment WASC expressed in its letter of July 29, 2013, that the program is still evolving; but it is, in our opinion, progressing in this regard. It is our hope this review will help move that progression along even further.

After a brief overview of the program and its students, the report will turn to a more direct discussion of BYUH's responses to WASC's concerns, and conclude with a succinct list of the review team's commendations and recommendations.

## **1. Program and Students:**

The BUS program is one of two undergraduate degree programs at BYUH that allows students to propose and pursue an individualized program of study. The other is the Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) program. In terms of process, the two programs are structured along parallel lines. For both programs, students must prepare an application that consists of a proposed program of study, along with a narrative that lays out (a) what the student wants to do after graduating, (b) why this particular program of study is a good way to prepare for that, and (c) why this outcome cannot be achieved through another, regular major at BYUH. As part of this application process, both BUS and IDS students must propose a "capstone experience" that is supposed to be accomplished largely within the context of a "capstone course". The capstone experience is meant to be essentially a portfolio piece, intended to help properly position the student for his or her desired future endeavors. The capstone course must occur after the proposal has been accepted, and at or near the end of the student's undergraduate career. For both programs, the students' proposals must be reviewed and approved by the program's director.

It was suggested by a few of the people that the team met with, as well as in one of the internally-generated documents supplied to us, that because of their close structural similarities, perhaps the BUS program should simply be folded into or administratively combined with the

IDS program. The review team does not agree with this suggestion, because despite some structural similarities, the two programs actually function quite differently and attract mutually exclusive sets of students.

The IDS program is intended to be as rigorous as, and operate akin to, a traditional major, just one that BYUH doesn't happen to currently offer. Both a student's application to the IDS program and their final capstone experience must have support and approval from an identified and dedicated faculty advisor, who is different than the program director. The capstone experience is intended to be akin to a research project, with the capstone course something like an independent study or directed reading course -- with the student working basically one-on-one with their faculty advisor -- and culminating in an academic paper or equivalent, appropriate for an application to a graduate program. Indeed, BYUH institutional data show that the percentage IDS program graduates attending graduate programs is right in line with graduates from the institution's other traditional majors. So, the IDS program attracts students who want to study a traditional major for traditional reasons. It may even be the case that from the beginning of their college career at BYUH, a student begins designing and planning an IDS degree.

By contrast, the BUS program is not intended to work quite like a traditional major: it is not intended to be as rigorous as one, nor is it something that students intend on doing from earlier on in their undergraduate careers. Rather, students primarily come to the BUS program after already having accumulated a significant number of hours toward graduation, and they are either (a) a traditional (full-time, residential) student who is unable to meet the grades and/or other requirements of a previously determined major, or (b) a non-traditional (older, non-resident, and local) student who previously attended BYUH but did not quite finish their declared major and cannot do so now, in many cases because their original degree is no longer offered by the institution. Concomitantly, their program of study is typically not modeled on or structured like a traditional academic major (see Sec. 4 below). Insofar as these students are preparing themselves for something definitive, it is not something requiring a specific degree or skill set typified by a traditional major. This suggests that the character of their final capstone project should be quite different than one for an IDS student, and, accordingly, that the capstone course through which they execute their final project should be quite different as well (see Sec. 5 below)

So, although the BUS and IDS programs have a surface similarity, they actually cater to mutually exclusive kinds of students. The IDS program seems generally recognized by the faculty and administration as a rigorous, boutique program; the BUS program is recognized as something quite different. Combining these two disparate programs under one administrative umbrella will result in little, if any, administrative synergies, and would run the real risk, through confusion and conflation, of diminishing the stature of the IDS program.

If the BUS program should not be combined with the IDS program, the question arises whether BYUH should continue to offer the program at all. The answer the team came to is a qualified "yes" – it should continue, but with a smaller footprint and a more focused strategy than in recent years. As sketched above, there are two main sorts of students currently drawn to or directed to the program: (1) students returning to BYUH after a considerable absence, whose original educational objectives were significantly interrupted after a considerable amount of

coursework had been completed, and (2) current full-time residential students who have typically demonstrated a substandard minimal performance pattern in their declared major(s). In the review team's consensus judgment, it is the first group of students for whom the BUS program can and should primarily function, as evidenced by our moving interview with some of the students in this latter category.

Although a call went out to all current BYUH students involved with or having an interest in the BUS program, that a program review team was in town to interview them, the team was only able to interview and spend time with two students, both of the first category. They were two middle-aged women, neighbors, living just down the road from the university; both of them had raised large families and recently gone through hardships involving their husbands. The degrees they'd each originally started, decades ago, were no longer offered. However, they were determined, for themselves, certainly, but also and mostly, for their children, to show that they could and should finish what they had started. Receiving their diplomas now was not likely to make serious differences in the material conditions of their lives, but it would still make important and valuable differences to them nonetheless. These students, relatively few in number and well within the purview of the kinds of students BYUH should be well positioned to serve, should be the primary constituency served by the BUS program.

The review team was not presented with any statistics about what percentage of students fall into which of the two categories. The institution has not yet measured this in any definitive way. However, it did seem quite apparent that the greatly expanded scope of the program from 2009-present was due almost entirely to an influx of students in the second category, those who were struggling to complete a traditional major and who were not candidates for the IDS program. The narrative for how and why this happened is consistently borne out through both the documents the team received and the interviews we conducted. Indeed, the strong reactions by the BYUH faculty and the formal review process initiated by WASC are in immediate and direct response to the form and character of this expansion of the program.

## **2. Administration and Advising**

It was primarily out of concerns for the second group of students that WASC made the following four recommendations to BYUH with regard to the BUS Program:

1. Place the program under faculty oversight;
2. Modify the BYUH Catalog to be more informative about the Program;
3. Explain better both the requirements for admission into and graduation from the Program, and;
4. Establish faculty created learning outcomes

As was discussed in our preliminary remarks above, BYUH's response to recommendation #1 has been immediate, and it has already resulted in rectifying many procedural irregularities and inconsistencies in the program's administration. However, because for such a long time the program did not operate with any clear and consistent administrative oversight, a large number and variety of advising and staff personnel, by default and with good

intentions, became the primary contact and action points for the program for prospective students. Even with the installation of a dedicated faculty director, the review team found evidence that there are still some of these proprietary sentiments lingering about: “too many cooks in the kitchen,” as it were. This situation means that as changes to the program are made by the new faculty director of the program, with regard to the other three WASC recommendations, communicating and implementing those changes becomes quite challenging. To rectify this situation, the contact and actions points, particularly with regard to program advising, should be consolidated as much as possible. Rather than the entire advising staff, one or two advisors should be responsible for BUS advising, and only they and the program director should be allowed to make changes to the student information system for BUS students (major declaration, BUS curriculum MAP, and et cetera).

### **3. Program Requirements**

With regard to WASC recommendations #2 and #3, the program director and BYUH administration have made progress. The program’s admission requirements/process, its program requirements, its expected learning outcomes, and its graduation requirements have all now been ensconced in sufficient detail in the University’s online catalog (<http://catalog.byuh.edu/node/252#BUS>).

However, there remain underlying difficulties in students’ and advisors’ ability to understand how to actually assemble a coherent program of study that meets the list of program requirements. One item on the list of program requirements is “the completion of 28 credit hours of primary focus in one or more pre-approved academic areas (i.e., minors, emphases, or clusters).” The last of these, “clusters”, consists in the catalog, currently, as a list of over fifty distinct groups of courses within single academic departments that, as it was explained to the review team, are supposed to give BUS students sufficient knowledge of a particular aspect of, e.g., Accounting or Exercise and Sports Science – knowledge sufficient for the goals of that student’s particular BUS program.

The underlying idea here is a good one: say, for example, a student wanted to design a BUS to prepare herself to be an independent guitar instructor. Some Marketing classes might be good for her to have, but she doesn’t need a whole Marketing minor. Asking the Business Management Department to thoughtfully prepare a cohesive list of courses – approved in advance – for students with a goal like our budding guitar instructor would be an incredibly helpful thing to the student, her advisor and the program director. If every BUS student were, in fact, putting together a program of study constructed primarily out of coherent pieces of the curriculum – minors, emphases and clusters – then people could feel more comfortable about the cogency of any particular student’s BUS program. And by “coherent piece”, we mean a piece that, like a minor or emphasis, has clearly identified goals and learning outcomes.

The problem is that at present, each “cluster” is simply a list of several courses, with just their abbreviated titles and no course descriptions. The individual clusters themselves have no description or narrative about what sorts of competencies they are supposed to give students and what learning outcomes a student can expect from them. In many cases, multiple clusters of 3-4

courses are listed for a particular department, with only one course in each cluster being different. Many of the clusters are composed entirely of lower-division (100- and 200-level) courses.

In short, although the clusters are listed on the catalog, it is not at all clear how they are supposed to be used in a student's program of study to help satisfy the BUS program's "28 credit hours of primary focus" requirement. The clusters appear to have been developed by departments and promulgated to students without sufficient guidance, vision and clarity. They appear to lack rationale and rigor. These clusters need to be better thought through by the departments and more thoroughly explained in the BYUH Catalog.

#### **4. Learning Outcomes and Assessment.**

The last recommendation WASC made was for the faculty to establish appropriate learning outcomes and summative assessment mechanisms for the BUS program. While such learning outcomes have indeed been established and promulgated, it is not yet clear whether they are appropriate, because (a) no student has yet completed a BUS program under the newly revamped regime, and, more importantly (b) the primary mechanism -- the capstone experience -- is so poorly conceived at the moment. However, while they are mostly quite general in nature, one particular, and particularly specific, learning outcome currently listed for the BUS program should be removed: students should, it states "demonstrate proficiency in a variety of software useful in professional environments." The inclusion of this expected outcome casts the program inescapably in a somewhat vocational light.

Other than this one off-note item, the listed learning outcomes for the BUS program seemed to the review team to be quite similar to the ones currently approved for the other programs (majors, minors and emphases) at BYUH. The problem is that unlike all these other programs, including the IDS program, the BUS program has no established instruments for assessing those stated learning outcomes, hence, the listed outcomes currently function only quite vaguely.

Currently, neither the capstone experience nor the capstone project have sufficient institutionally developed structural underpinnings. Nothing substantive about either of them appears in the catalog; insofar as there are any specific requirements, it is left to the student to suggest what they should be. The current capstone experience course, Career Development 302, is a 1-credit hour class designed and intended as a generic career development practicum applicable to any major: preparing your resume, researching your potential employer, and marketing yourself to them. This all relies on the expectation that the student has already gone through some demonstration of and reflection about what s/he has learned through their particular program of study.

Structurally, this is what the capstone experience should be designed to let the student execute and capture, but precisely how that is supposed to happen has not yet been sufficiently thought through, much less implemented. At the front end, the "capstone experience plan," submitted with the student's application to the BUS program, should have a standard template of

required information. That template should be established, and revisited periodically, by a faculty-led steering committee. Among that information should be a plan for a project, one that will be executed as the concluding artifact assessed at the end of the capstone experience course. It is in the context of being in a well thought-out capstone course that culminates in a well-planned and well-executed project that the student should demonstrate the stated learning outcomes of the program.

There are a host of existing capstone project paradigms at a plethora of other institutions that look much different from the sort of research-paper oriented one in place for the IDS program, including things like civic engagement and service learning. They often require students to collaborate, work in conjunction with businesses and organizations external to the institution, engage in project planning, and produce joint reports or presentations targeted to disparate audiences. There are a host of effective and determinative assessment opportunities imbedded in such activities. The BYUH faculty, in the form of a steering committee for the BUS program, needs to investigate these paradigms and determine which of them, alone or in combination, can be incorporated into the institution and serve as appropriate mechanisms for both (a) effectively preparing these BUS students for the world, and (b) demonstrating desired learning outcomes appropriate for the program and conversant with those appropriate for the institution as a whole. This will be an ongoing, iterative process, requiring reevaluation and adjustments over time.

### **Commendations:**

- The program plays a necessary role within the mission of the University.
- The administration has moved assertively to make changes to the program in response to the specific concerns raised by the BYUH faculty and WASC.
- The administration has developed a plan to assess the program's stated learning outcomes over the next five years.
- Throughout all the discussions about the program, the University has shown a sincere compassion and concern for the individual student.

### **Recommendations:**

- The statement of learning outcomes, while a good initial response to the WASC concerns, still needs a lot work. As it is currently promulgated on both online and printed materials, it is rather vague and uneven. The inclusion of the specific outcome of "demonstrate proficiency in a variety of software useful in professional environments" casts the program in a somewhat vocational light.
- With regard to the assessment of general education-related learning outcomes indicated on the "BYUH Multi-year assessment Plan", it is not clear how the program can adequately do this, because the most crucial and obvious context for doing this is the capstone course, and it is not clear what this is supposed to be. A more rigorous, 2-3 credit hour capstone experience should be standardized and designed specifically for these students. The currently designated course is simply inadequate.

**Recommendations (cont'd):**

- The rationale for the various department-generated clusters is not clear, nor is it clear how these clusters, when combined together or with other concentrations, e.g., minors and certificates, are selected and combined to constitute the 28 core hour requirements of the major. Each cluster, at a minimum, should include at least one upper-division course.
- Establish a steering committee, composed mostly of faculty drawn from across the curriculum, that is responsible for establishing (1) a template for the “capstone experience plan”, and (2) an appropriate model(s) for a capstone experience(s) that adequately serve the needs of both the students and the institution.
- Advising for the program should be consolidated.
- Develop more effective channels for communicating program changes to students, advisors, faculty and staff.