

**BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

No. BHE 24-43

BOARD DATE: April 30, 2024

**APPROVAL OF LETTER OF INTENT OF BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY TO AWARD
THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN INDIVIDUALIZED STUDIES AND AUTHORIZATION FOR
FAST TRACK REVIEW**

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) has evaluated the Letter of Intent of **Bridgewater State University** to award the **Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies** and has determined that the proposal aligns with BHE criteria. Accordingly, the BHE authorizes the Commissioner to review the program and to make a final determination on degree granting authority pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

VOTED: Motion approved and advanced to the full BHE by the Executive Committee on 4/22/2024; and adopted by the BHE on 4/30/2024.

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 15A, Section 9(b); AAC 18-40

Contact: Richard Riccardi, Sc.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
April 30, 2024
Bridgewater State University
Letter of Intent
Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies

DEGREE TITLE ABSTRACT ON INTENT AND MISSION OF PROGRAM

Bridgewater State University intends that the proposed degree for a Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies is responsive to the educational needs of students that are not adequately addressed by a single disciplinary approach. The purpose of the proposed Individualized Studies degree program is to help students design a plan of study that supports a multi- and inter-disciplinary course of study not represented in pre-existing program offerings. The proposed degree program, offered through The College of Continuing Studies, intends to provide a pathway for students to pursue personal and professional goals within the academic rubric of a Bachelor of Arts degree program. Bridgewater State University states that this proposed degree program is ideal for returning students who have already carved out career paths that can be supported by the completion of an undergraduate college degree. This proposed degree program would allow for flexibility and creativity beyond the boundaries of a conventional degree-seeking program. Each Individualized Studies degree program would be unique, self-designed for each student, offering the student the opportunity to pursue deep learning while offering a great deal of flexibility and fostering intellectual growth in a variety of academic areas. Bridgewater State University intends to offer the major only for continuing studies students and is not designed as a second major for Education Students.

The proposed BA in Individualized Studies program was approved by Bridgewater State University's Board of Trustees on December 14, 2023. The LOI was circulated on December 19, 2023. No comments were received.

A. ALIGNMENT WITH MASSACHUSETTS GOALS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Address Gaps in Opportunity and Achievement in Alignment with Campus-Wide Goals

According to the Factbook 20-21, the Bridgewater State University campus goals are:

Goal 1 - Focus resources and decisions on the overarching priority of student success.

Goal 2 - Provide a teaching and learning environment with exceptional educational opportunities for intellectual, creative, and professional growth.

Goal 3 - Provide opportunities for personal and professional growth for faculty, librarians, and staff in support of organizational progress.

Goal 4 - Serve as a regional catalyst for economic, cultural, and intellectual engagement.

Goal 5 - Advance diversity and social justice with impact in the region and beyond.

The proposed major will provide a teaching and learning environment with exceptional educational opportunities for intellectual, creative, and professional growth by using high-impact practices. High-impact practices will support student success and educational opportunities for intellectual, creative, and professional growth (Goals 1 and 2). The proposed major is structured to include many high-impact practices that support the persistence and completion of degrees by all students.

Program or Department Supports to Ensure Student Retention and Completion

The proposed degree program will be offered through The College of Continuing Studies, which offers support to students through online student support and success. They maintain a website with links for:

1. Technical Requirements
2. Academic Technology
3. Success Strategies for Online Students
4. Academic Support and Student Services
 - a. Academic Achievement Center

The Academic Achievement Center provides Bridgewater State University's diverse student population with the foundation to achieve academic success. The Center is a welcoming environment that delivers comprehensive student-centered services, empowering those we serve to explore and develop academic, personal, and self-advocacy skills.

b. Student Accessibility Services

Bridgewater State University is committed to ensuring all individuals have equal access to its programs and services, offering many services to students with documented medical conditions, who are physically challenged or have psychological or learning disabilities.

c. Learning Assistance, Academic Coaching, and Tutoring

Learning Assistance is an umbrella term for tutoring and Academic Coaching. Both are considered "learning assistance" services, as they work with the student to strengthen their skills, both academically and personally.

d. Library Services for Distance Learners

As Bridgewater State University students, off-campus learners have access to library materials, both print and online, and services including Circulation, Reference, Interlibrary Loan/Document Delivery Services, and more. Off-campus students may conduct research by using the databases on the library's website.

e. Academic Integrity Policy and Student Community Standards

Academic integrity refers to Bridgewater State University's policies against plagiarism and properly citing sources. Institutions of higher education are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. In this pursuit, academic honesty is of fundamental importance. Student Community Standards conduct refers to appropriate behavior both on and off-campus. The Office of Community Standards supports the development of a thriving learning environment by helping students learn the value of their rights and to realize the importance of their responsibility as members of the campus community, and in all communities of which they are a part.

f. The Wellness Center

The Wellness Center provides same-day acute and primary care services to all registered students through their Health Services. Regardless of your insurance plan, the Wellness Center provides a variety of services ranging from sick visits, gynecological health, laboratory testing, physicals, and much more. The Wellness Center also offers Counseling Services to enhance students' emotional, social, and intellectual development. They provide preventative mental health outreach programs for all the university in the belief that concerns can be addressed before they become a problem for the individual or the community.

g. Lived Use, Name Pronunciation, Gender Identity, & Pronouns

If a student has a lived name, gender identity, and/or pronouns that the student would like to share with the student's instructor/s and/or classmates, the student can update your information directly in InfoBear.

h. Student Life

The student can learn more about all the engagement opportunities Bridgewater State University has to offer, such as Spirit & Traditions, Diversity, and Social Justice, and Commuter Life.

i. Discrimination and Harassment

Equity and inclusion is a priority at Bridgewater State University. If the student feels that the student has been discriminated against or harassed based on a legally protected category to which the student belongs (i.e., race, color, religion, national origin, persons of color, age, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital/parental status, and veteran status), the student can reach out to the Director of Equal Opportunity/Title IX Coordinator.

Alliances and Partnerships with PK-12, Other IHE's, Community Employers

Articulation to Bridgewater State University from Community Colleges:

Bridgewater State University has working articulation agreements with all regional community colleges including a CC2BSU program with local partners and participation in MassTransfer. Most of the coursework required in the first two years of the degree program is taught at community colleges, including courses in humanities, general education requirements, and course-level articulation is well established for these classes.

Relationship to Employer Community

Bridgewater State University's College of Continuing Studies will partner with their Internship Program Office to provide opportunities to explore careers, gain professional experience, prepare for graduation, and enhance skills and qualifications for future jobs. Students will earn academic credit and often earn additional income as well. The proposed degree program will provide additional opportunities for employers to promote and support degree attainment for their employees who have some college and no degree. The proposed degree program will also allow the university to work with employer partners to develop programs tailored to a specific employee population and or role, especially in emerging skill areas where a traditional degree path may not be available or is in development.

Advisory Group

Bridgewater State University intends to invite all (full- and part-time) Bridgewater State University faculty and librarians to join the inaugural Advisory Board for the proposed degree program. The board will have representation from each college and many departments on campus with the purpose of engaging students and helping them to develop knowledge, insights, problem solving skills, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and a passion for learning through collaborative interdisciplinary learning and research. The Advisory Board will work with the program coordinator to identify and build interconnections between many Bridgewater State University initiatives using evidence-based practices as well as outreach to community partners through programs such as Collaborative University Business Experiences (CUBES). The Individualized Studies Advisory Board intends to meet throughout the academic year as an inclusive and collaborative team environment. The Advisory Board intends to work with the

program coordinator on short- and long-term strategic goals for the proposed major, identify the means to achieve them, and develop and implement appropriate assessment plans.

Relationship to MassHire Regional Blueprints

By definition, an individualized studies degree is not restricted by labor market alignment, as the proposed degree program will offer many and varied career options as well as potential specializations. Students will be encouraged to use Bridgewater State University’s Career Services and Internship offices to fine-tune the job opportunities appropriate to their needs and interests. The focus of the proposed degree program will be integrative learning with the goal of synthesis, where students will engage with the disparate parts of their education, varied interests, and personal and professional goals. The skills developed will support the workforce development goals outlined in the 2018 Southeast Region Labor Market Blueprint. The proposed degree program will support an effective and qualified workforce by fostering interpersonal competencies, thinking, problem-solving, academic, and technical skills. Through internships or field placement, students will develop workplace and business competencies, as well as industry-specific competencies. The proposed degree program will provide a critically needed degree-completion option for post-traditional learners with some college and no degree—including incumbent workers, career-changers, and the unemployed. The design of the proposed degree program will allow for increased degree attainment among the region’s population.

Duplication

The August 2022 Educause report included the following national and regional data.

National Competitive Analysis (Utilizing CIP Codes)				
Institution Name	2020 Conferrals	Growth % YOY (2020)	2015-2020 CAGR	Program
Liberty University	1,470	5%	8%	Bachelor's in Interdisciplinary Studies
Texas A&M University- College Station	1,153	1%	12%	Potential Bachelor's with an Individualized Major currently in the works
University of Central Florida	879	37%	7%	BS in Interdisciplinary Studies
University of North Texas	861	7%	3%	BS in Integrative Studies

Florida International University	786	-30%	74%	BA in Interdisciplinary Studies
University of Houston-Downtown	741	-13%	6%	BS in Interdisciplinary Studies
Texas A&M University-Commerce	607	7%	5%	BA/BS in Liberal Studies
Texas State University	544	-7%	2%	Bachelor's of Applied Arts and Sciences
Florida Atlantic University	500	12%	65%	Bachelor's in Individualized Major
Texas A&M University- San Antonio	459	-2%	1%	Bachelor's of Applied Arts and Sciences

Regional Competitive Analysis (Utilizing CIP Codes)				
Institution Name	2020 Conferrals	Growth % YOY (2020)	2015-2020 CAGR	Program
University of Massachusetts Amherst	280	-16%	1%	Bachelor's Degree with Individualized Concentration
Southern Connecticut State University	186	-30%	79%	Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies
Touro College	164	-17%	-8%	Bachelor's Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies
Binghamton University	115	6%	-4%	Bachelor's Degree with Individualized Major
Franklin and Marshall College	112	28%	14%	N/A Unclear as to whether F&M offers a specialized UG degree that can be personalized.
Fitchburg State University	105	14%	0%	BA/BS in Interdisciplinary Studies
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania	88	-12%	-4%	Bachelor's Degree in Exploratory Studies
SUNY at Albany	86	-39%	-15%	Bachelor's in Student-Initiated Concentrations
Stony Brook University	84	2%	3%	Bachelor's in Multidisciplinary Studies
Millersville University of Pennsylvania	77	28%	39%	Bachelor's in Multidisciplinary Studies
Programs in green font = reporting online conferrals				

The proposed degree program is offered by other Massachusetts public institutions of higher education: Fitchburg State University, Framingham State University (concentration within Liberal Arts degree) Salem State University, Worcester State University, and UMass Amherst. Of note: **Fitchburg State** requires more credits at 36 credits for the degrees. The degree is a choice of listed electives rather than self-designed.

Framingham State has a Liberal Studies/Interdisciplinary Studies Major. It appears to be designed for Education major (licensure) as a second major.

Salem State is a similar model in that it is self-designed. However, the degree requires 48 credits to complete.

Worcester State's model appears to combine two minors into a major. Students select an established minor PLUS another of the University's established minors, a concentration, or a self-designed cluster of classes. There is some element of a self-designed model.

UMass Amherst University Without Walls (UWW), students design their own concentration, an individualized program of study and can finish a bachelor's degree online. UMass accepts 105 transfer credits.

Innovative Approaches to Teaching and Learning

The proposed degree program will both require and encourage experiences beyond the traditional classroom. Students will apply the concepts of their unique area of study in an internship or an independent study project. Individualized Studies majors will be encouraged to complete an internship for credit within their program. An internship can be an invaluable resource for building relationships with the community, networking within a field of interest, or building on an already-existing career foundation. Advisors will encourage service-learning, undergraduate research, and travel course options. Each of these possibilities will include credit-based experiential learning. There will be collaboration with Career Services and the Internship Program Office.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH CAMPUS STRATEGIC PLAN AND MISSION

The proposed degree program will promote student success, provide a teaching and learning environment with opportunities for intellectual, creative, and professional growth, and support diversity and social justice. The proposed degree program will support the Academic Affairs Strategic plan; specifically the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1: Providing Dynamic Learning Environments.

- 1b. Develop new graduate and undergraduate programs aligned with strategic plan.
- 1d. Improve course offerings and program schedules to enable students to complete their programs in a timely manner.
- 1f. Address the specialized needs of post-traditional students.

Goal 3: Investing in High-Impact Practices

- 3a. Create comprehensive advising plans for each program addressing diverse student needs.
- 3g. Ensure equitable research opportunities for students through Undergraduate Research and Honors.

Goal 6: Serving as A Beacon for Diversity And Social Justice.

- 6a. Utilize a diversity lens to assess content and pedagogical improvement of degree programs.
- 6c. Actively work to further diversify and support the student population.
- 6e. Engage in the development of academic programming focused on social justice.
- 6g. Expand service-learning and community engagement opportunities for our students.
- 6h. Promote inclusive teaching and professional practice.

Goals and Objectives (Form B)

Individualized Studies graduates should have a strong background in analysis, interpretation, and problem-solving. They should be self-directed learners who thrive in pathways that are both creative and specific. Individualized Studies majors should have a career goal in mind before declaring the proposed program and should be able to articulate that goal and how the proposed degree has fashioned their learning according to that goal when they graduate. The student's career and future educational goals will help shape the individualized program they create. Career options for Individualized Studies majors are extensive and depend, in part, on the student's self-designed curriculum. The expertise acquired through the Capstone project will give Individualized Studies graduates a competitive edge in their chosen career fields. The proposed degree program will appeal to adult students who may already be working in a profession and require the completion of a bachelor's degree to achieve specific personal, professional, or vocational goals.

The learning outcomes will be assessed during and at the end of the proposed program during the Capstone courses. The learning outcomes are that graduates will be able to:

1. Through a senior capstone project, students will demonstrate how they integrated different areas of study to examine questions, problems, or issues raised in an interdisciplinary field.
2. The students will apply interdisciplinarity, and field-specific, knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems.
3. The students will develop lifelong learning skills, demonstrated by:
 - a. Exploring a topic in-depth, yielding a rich awareness and/ or little-known information indicating intense interest in the subject.
 - b. Organizing and synthesizing evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.
 - c. Combining or synthesizing existing ideas, images, or expertise in original ways.
 - d. Applying quantitative analysis of data as the basis for competent judgments, drawing reasonable and appropriately qualified conclusions from this work.
 - e. Using a variety of information sources appropriate to the scope and discipline of

a research question with multiple criteria such as relevance to the research question, currency, authority, audience, and bias or point of view. [Information literacy]

- f. Applying the process of designing, evaluating, and implementing a strategy to answer an open-ended question or achieve a desired goal. [problem-solving]
 - g. Connecting facts, theories, and knowledge from their multi-disciplinary academic fields to civic engagement and to their participation in civic life, politics, and government.
 - h. Interpreting intercultural experience from their own perspective and more than one worldview and demonstrating the ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.
 - i. [Intercultural competence] Recognizing ethical issues when they are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR grasping cross-relationships among the issues.
4. Students will synthesize and integrate information and ideas.

C. ALIGNMENT WITH OPERATIONAL AND FINANCIAL OBJECTIVES OF INSTITUTION

The College administration is supportive of the proposed degree program, the students, and the faculty. The proposed degree program will have minimal impact on the finances of the institution, as the proposed degree program will use primarily existing courses and resources. Enrollment projections are expected to gradually increase over the next four years as the proposed program develops.

Enrollment Projections (Form C)

The proposed degree program is planned with the capacity to enroll a total of 36 students in its first year, serving a mix of new and continuing students. The enrollment figures in Form C assume increases in both new and continuing as the program gains traction at the university, resulting in an almost tripling of size by year 5.

*Resources and Financial Statement of Estimated Net Impact on Institution
(Form D, Appendices)*

Since the proposed degree program uses existing courses and resources, the expenses are minimal (marketing and small increases in both full-time and part-time faculty) and the income potential is tremendous. Even factoring in a startup cost of \$20,000, the proposed degree program anticipates a first-year profit of \$87,876. This figure expands exponentially over the 5 years presented in form D, with a profit of \$366,983 in year 5.

STAFF REVIEW AND VALIDATION

Staff thoroughly reviewed the **LOI** proposing full degree granting authority for the **Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies** program submitted by **Bridgewater State University**. Staff validate that the **LOI** includes all data required by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education. Staff recommendation is for BHE authorization for the Commissioner to review the program pursuant to the Fast-Track review protocol.

Form A: Curriculum Outline

Required (Core) Courses in the Major (Total # courses required = 3)		
<i>Course Number</i>	<i>Course Title</i>	<i>Credit Hours</i>
INTD 202	Introduction to Integrative Learning Not transferable	3
INTD 380	Interdisciplinary Research: Theory & Practice	3
INTD 495	Senior Capstone in Integrative Learning (CWRM) Not transferable	3
	Sub Total Required Credits	9
	Electives in Self-Designed Major Courses must come from at least two departments. Five of the seven courses must be at the 300- or 400-level. At least half the credits selected for the major must come from courses taught at BSU. This could include travel courses, independent or directed study	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Electives in Self-Designed Major	3
	Sub Total Elective Credits	21
	Total Credits in Major (9 + 21)	30
Distribution of General Education Requirements Attach List of General Education Offerings (Course Numbers, Titles, and Credits)		
Core Skills Requirements ENGL 101/101E - Writing Rhetorically (CWR1) 3 credits. ENGL 102 - Writing Rhetorically with Sources (CWR2) 3 credits Foundations of Logical Reasoning (CLOR) 3 credits. Foundations of Mathematical Reasoning (CMAR) 3 credits Spoken Communication (CSPK) 3 credits		15
Core Seminars First- and Second-Year Seminars (CFYS; CWRT, CSYS – [CWRT or CSPI])		6
Core Distribution		9-15

Fine and Performing Arts (CFPA) and Humanities (CHUM) (see attached Core advising matrix)	
Core Distribution Natural Sciences (CNSL; CNSN) (see attached Core advising matrix)	7
Core Distribution Social and Behavioral Sciences (CSOC) (see attached Core advising matrix)	0-6
Additional Distribution Requirements Writing or Speaking Intensive CWR2 or CSPI Global Cultural (CGCL- 2 courses) Multicultural (CMCL) Application of Quantitative Skills or second Mathematical reasoning (CQR) US and MA Constitutions (CUSC)	6-18
Total number of credits will vary, depending on the student's choice of courses. Courses can meet multiple Core requirements (see attached advising guide and course grid)	
Sub Total General Education Totals	43-67
Curriculum Summary	
Total number of courses required for the degree	23-27
Total credit hours required for degree	67-79
Prerequisite, Concentration or Other Requirements	
Total free elective courses/courses toward minor/second major	14-18
Total credits for degree	120

Form B: LOI Goals and Objectives

Goal	Measurable Objective	Strategy for Achievement	Timetable
Develop standing recruitment procedures and meet enrollment targets	Meet enrollment targets (see Program Enrollment Projection Table below) Use timelines and Benchmarks set by Office of Marketing and Communications for Recruitment	Assigned to Department Chair and Office of Marketing and Communications, Office of Admissions	On-going, with continuous review
Maintain excellent faculty teaching	Review of syllabi and course materials by program faculty. Continued support by the department in which the faculty is teaching	Assigned to Program or Area Studies Coordinator. Use resources provided by the Teaching and Technology Center and the Office for Teaching and Learning	On-going, with continuous review
Develop, offer, and assess effectiveness of all courses	All courses in major have been offered, artifacts from each class collected and evaluated by the effectiveness in student achievement of the program learning outcomes.	Assigned to Program or Area Studies Coordinator to review samples for continuous program improvement.	On-going, with all new classes taught once before Spring 2026.
Graduates find relevant job or admission to graduate program	Review of job placement rates with the goal of 60% of students placed in relevant jobs and/or admitted to graduate school within 1 year of graduation.	Career Services data reviewed Individualized Studies Advisory Board. Coordinator tracks graduates for job and graduate school placement.	After first graduate, roughly 2026.

Form C: LOI Program Enrollment

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
New Full-Time	5	3	6	10	10
Continuing Full-Time	5	7	10	20	30
New Part-Time	14	15	20	20	20
Continuing Part-Time	12	15	20	30	30
Totals	36	40	60	80	90

Form D: LOI Program Budget

One Time/ Start Up Costs		Annual Enrollment				
	Cost Categories	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	Full Time Faculty (Salary & Fringe)					
	Part Time/Adjunct Faculty (Salary & Fringe)	\$14,224	\$14,509	\$14,799	\$15,095	\$15,397
	Staff	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500	\$7,500
	General Administrative Costs					
	Instructional Materials, Library Acquisitions					
	Facilities/Space/Equipment					
	Field & Clinical Resources					
\$20,000	Marketing	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
	Other (Specify)					
One Time/ Start- Up Support		Annual Income				
	Revenue Sources	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
	Grants					
	Tuition	\$11,400	\$15,960	\$21,888	\$29,640	\$31,920
	Fees	\$133,200	\$186,480	\$255,744	\$346,320	\$372,960
	Departmental					
	Reallocated Funds					
	Other (specify)					
	TOTALS	\$144,600	\$202,440	\$277,632	\$375,960	\$404,880