

# Weber State University

## Response to the 2021 Review of the General Studies Program

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Dean's Response: Bruce Bowen, Associate Provost for Enrollment Services  
Date: October 8, 2021

First, I express my appreciation to the five-faculty review team for their efforts. A big thanks also goes to Dr. Leigh Shaw for wading through a mountain of material in drafting the initial program review. I also express appreciation for Leslie Park, Executive Director of the Student Success Center, for all her contributions throughout this process.

As has been noted in these documents, this is the first time General Studies has undergone a program review. Interestingly, this review is unlike any other. Since I serve as the "Dean" I have been asked to provide the Dean's response. Therefore, with the goal of brevity, I will only comment on the five themes covered in the program response.

### **1. Program Mission and Curriculum**

General Studies is the name assigned to an associate degree offered primarily to undecided students who are exploring different majors of interest. The degree offering is not associated with any specific college. It has no dean, department chair, faculty, or any influence in the curriculum comprising the degree. It is a historical artifact based on the importance of providing academic advising and career exploration for students who are undecided in their major.

From an historical perspective, the academic advising, graduation sign-off, convocation/commencement, and administration of students majoring in General Studies has been performed by the Student Success Center, which reports to the Associate Provost for Enrollment Services. The management of these duties and the service provided to these students has, for years, met university expectations. We award the highest number of associate degrees at the university year after year—despite ongoing efforts to help students choose a bachelor's degree and move them out to the various colleges.

In terms of curriculum, the review team identified several concerns about general education outcomes and assessment (e.g. Signature Assignments, GELOs, etc.). I recommend that these concerns be fully addressed—especially as they relate to concurrent enrollment general education courses being taught by high school adjunct faculty.

### **2. Program Advising**

The Student Success Center provides a variety of services to General Studies students including new student orientation, on-boarding, academic advising, career exploration, mentoring, coaching, referral services, "bounce-back" assistance for those in academic trouble, Starfish retention efforts, etc. Each academic advisor receives extensive initial training as well as on-going training that adhere to professional NACADA and CAS standards.

Career exploration is facilitated using the *Major and Career Navigation* (MCN) program. Students expressing interest in a particular major or career area are advised in their general

education course selection based on informal meta-majors so they are not harmed by taking incorrect courses or course sequencing. General Studies academic advisors actively work to help students select a major and transition them to the college offering their four-year program/degree.

### **3. Concurrent Enrollment**

Concurrent enrollment is a product of the Utah Legislature. The program has grown year after year and is gradually replacing other college-prep programs such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Currently, 70% of all incoming new freshman have taken concurrent enrollment courses. The Student Success Center dual-enrollment advisors work closely with the Admissions recruiters to convert concurrent enrollment students into fully matriculated degree-seeking students. Part of the University's new strategic plan is to increase the number of concurrent students enrolling at WSU from 22% to 34% in the next five years.

The review team listed a number of concerns regarding concurrent enrollment. Most of the issues have little to do with the General Studies degree nor the Student Success Center. However, I fully agree with several of the review team's concerns. To that end, I recommend the institution address the following issues dealing with concurrent enrollment.

- Examine whether a change is possible with the current state funding-model which encourages participation in concurrent enrollment courses in the sophomore, junior, and senior years of high school.
- Examine whether a change is possible with the state funding-model (scholarships) that encourages earning a certificate in general education or an associate degree in general studies prior to high school graduation. This is often detrimental to course sequencing issues—especially for STEM majors.
- Address the first-right-of-refusal requirement that essentially force colleges into offering any new college course requested by high schools/school districts.
- Address the general lack of awareness WSU faculty have regarding concurrent enrollment and its impact.
- Standardize a model for sharing state-provided concurrent enrollment funds with academic departments.
- Address concerns regarding FTE and SCH loss due to expanding concurrent enrollment courses.
- Improve the oversight of WSU general education offered in high school to ensure/monitor/assess the big questions (BQ), signature assignments (SA), and GELOs are on-par with general education courses taught on campus.
- Address any inconsistencies in course learning outcomes, grading standards, and readiness for next-level course work post concurrent enrollment.
- Review the selection standards, on-boarding, training, and mentoring of high school adjunct faculty.
- Explore co-teaching models between WSU and high school faculty.
- Explore technology-delivered instructional options that may be used by WSU faculty for concurrent courses.
- Explore how to best serve first generation or BIPOC students taking concurrent course work.

- Explore teaching loads and release time for WSU faculty working with high school adjuncts.
- Review any legal implications of teaching “sensitive” material to minor high school students enrolled in college courses.
- Prepare for Utah’s technical colleges that will soon begin offering concurrent course work.
- Manage the growing demand from Davis and Weber School Districts who are motivated to have their students earn an associate degree or certificate in general education prior to high school graduation.
- Explore how to more effectively work with Admissions recruiters and dual-enrollment advisors to help students select associate degrees within specific majors rather than a General Studies degree.
- Explore how to reduce the cost of textbooks and course materials for concurrent enrollment students (e.g. using open educational resources, etc.).

#### **4. Improved Information Sharing**

The review team expressed the desire that the institution more clearly differentiate between the General Studies degree and the University’s general education requirements. Given that the names are similar only adds to the potential confusion, and I support these efforts for greater clarity.

The review team also recommended that information be shared regarding the General Studies major in the hope of helping more students move into a bachelor’s degree. It is important to note that the General Studies academic advisors have been doing this in the past and will continue in the future. In addition to helping students explore different careers, as soon as any student has a firm (or mostly firm) idea of their major, then hand-offs are made to the specific college academic advisor.

Currently, General Studies academic advisors actively work informally with meta-majors in terms of advising on quantitative literacy courses and specific general education breadth courses. I recommend the University formally adopt a meta-major model which will facilitate the transition of students from the Student Success Center to the various colleges. Ideally, meta-majors will allow students to explore options while holding them harmless so that their first two-semester course work allows movement into any major within the meta-major. However, implementing a full meta-major model will require *significant* curricular work on the part of faculty.

#### **5. Program Organizational Structure**

Structural change is the purview of University leadership. As stated earlier, the General Studies degree has no college, no dean, no department chair, and no faculty.

On the other hand, the current structure has been performing well given its “uniqueness”. The review team’s interviews with students show their satisfaction with the services currently being provided by the Student Success Center and the data demonstrate the efficiency in which General Studies students progress toward graduation.

### **Concluding Comments**

In conclusion, I offer three comments. First, in any discussion of “next steps” it is very important to separate the performance of the Student Success Center in serving General Studies students and the comments/recommendations made for general education improvement.

Second, concurrent enrollment is a complexity of challenges—some at the legislative level, others at the curriculum/faculty level, and still others dealing with fiscal and resource distribution. Notwithstanding, concurrent enrollment students are an important market segment and will continue to be a focus area for the Admissions Office recruiters.

Finally, structural changes for the General Studies degree may or may not be pursued by university leadership. In the meantime, we are happy to continue the existing structure as long as needed.