

To: Senate Steering

From: Senate Planning & Review Committee
Frances Jackson, Chair

Re: B.A. Liberal Studies Program

The Senate Planning & Review Committee (SPRC) has reviewed the proposal to start a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Liberal Studies (BALS) and makes the following report to the University Senate.

Overview

The BALS proposal is submitted by the College of Arts and Sciences. It is not submitted by a CAS Department. The primary author is not a faculty member. Dr. Kathleen Moore, Associate Dean of the CAS, is the primary author of the proposal.

This program targets first year college students who either want a curriculum composed of two distinct areas of study or an interdisciplinary concentration. Students will take four classes in liberal studies:

2 foundation courses – LBS 100 and LBS 200. LBS 100 is an exploration of the Arts and Sciences. LBS 200 explores interdisciplinary approaches to liberal studies.

2 capstone courses – LBS 495 and LBS 496. This is a 2- semester thesis/capstone experience.

In addition to the four LBS courses, students are also required to take a discipline specific methods course. The foundation courses must be taken before junior standing is achieved. Students may select an interdisciplinary CAS concentration of at least 28 credits (20 or more upper-division) or two minors (20 or more credits upper division), with at least 8 credits in each minor at the upper division level. Courses selected must come from disciplines within the CAS unless an exception is requested and approved to take courses from one of the professional schools.

A tenure-track faculty Director will be hired. Also, a faculty Executive Committee will be established to advise students, approve courses, and monitor the program. The budget includes money to replace full-time tenure-track faculty with part-time replacements. Five Graduate Assistants are also requested.

It is projected that this program will attract 10 new students a year. While it is anticipated that other students will transfer to this program, this degree is not dependent on that expectation.

Strengths

It is hoped that this program will fill a need that is different from the goals of the Bachelors of Integrative Studies (BIS) program. The focus on first year students will allow FTIACs to enter Oakland University and plan a program that includes two distinctive areas of study from among

the programs in the CAS. Thus students in the BALS program will have the option to tailor a major to their interests by pursuing two areas of related study, rather than declaring a major in one program. Ultimately, students will be better prepared for a varied and fluid job market.

This degree is consistent with the aims of the CAS to enhance interdisciplinary study. It has the effect of creating a liberal arts college experience within the larger university setting, a unique feature of this proposal.

Concerns

There are several concerns about this program. First, it is a concern that the primary author for this proposal is not a faculty member. The Senate is asked to carefully consider the precedent that is being set by approving a program that is not faculty or departmentally sponsored. SPRC questions whether the Dean's office should be initiating new degree programs. Since there is no letter of support from Dean Sudol, there is no written commitment to providing resources to support this program. Since this proposal is not sponsored by a department in CAS, the lack of a letter of support from Dean Sudol is a major weakness in this proposal.

A second area of concern is the confusion that is sure to arise between the BALS program and the BIS program. SPRC requested changes to decrease this confusion, but it comes as no shock that BIS faculty have expressed grave concerns about the BALS proposal. To make the differences between the BALS program and BIS program more distinct, the minors selected by students in the BALS program must be from disciplines within the CAS, although exceptions can be made. BIS students can take courses from the CAS and/or the professional schools. Also, the foundation courses must be taken before students achieve junior standing. These changes notwithstanding, there are still concerns about perceived overlap with the BIS program.

A third concern is the faculty who will teach the courses for this program. While it is assumed that the faculty Director will teach some courses, that is not explicitly stated in the proposal. Also, based on experiences of the Honors College, and in opposition to what is stated in the proposal, there may be considerable difficulty getting tenure-track faculty released by their Chairs to teach in this program. In addition, replacing tenure track faculty with part-time faculty may not be perceived by some Chairs as a quid pro quo exchange.

Finally, with a projected 10 students a year, the need for 5 Graduate Assistants is not strongly supported. Initially, it is expected that Graduate Assistants will come from students in the M.A. in Liberal Studies program. However, SPRC still considers the number of graduate assistants for the projected enrollment to be quite high.

Recommendation

SPRC worked closely with UCUI in sharing information about this proposal. Both groups had overlapping concerns about aspects of this proposal. The final, approved version included modifications that were not in the proposal originally sent to SPRC. It is the modified version that was approved by SPRC.

By a vote of 4 -1 SPRC recommends approval of this proposal.