

## ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### 2018 PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1.	Reporting Institution	Eastern Illinois University
2.	Program Reviewed	Bachelor of Arts in General Studies
3.	Date	2018
4.	Contact Person	Dr. Carrie Johnson
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5.	<b>Overview</b>	

This program was created in 1972 under the title of the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts Degree Program (BOG). In the early 1970s, higher education focused almost exclusively on educating 18-23 year olds. Access to higher education for the mature adult, with job and family responsibilities, was extremely limited. Available programs required adult students to take classes during the day in a format consistent with that provided to traditional students. This often meant the adult would be required to quit his/her job and move closer to campus, neither of which were viable options for most adults. In response to these barriers, Dr. Robert Pringle, Vice Chancellor of the Board of Governors University System, led the development of the BOG degree program.

Since 1973, this degree program at EIU has had two name changes and is currently known as the B.A. in General Studies (BGS). This degree combines the liberal arts and interdisciplinary education. The BGS program is unique as it permits students to take an array of classes allowing them to complete a more general degree than the typical undergraduate degree major. Rather than taking a large number of courses in a major department, students engage in learning in a variety of disciplines. Although it is not required, students may earn up to two minors.

This degree allows students flexibility by letting learners select subjects they wish to study, and optimizes acceptance of transfer credit. Previous credits earned at regionally accredited colleges, military training, ACE certified workplace training, and proficiency examinations can all be applied towards the BGS degree.

Specific learning objectives that graduates will be able to perform include: (1) Recognize the role critical thinking and problem-solving has in learning and reflect upon its impact in their various environments; (2) Use technology skillfully in the learning process; (3) Demonstrate effective presentation skills; (4) Compose coherent written documents which adhere to the standards of college-level writing; (5) Assess the value of higher education and predict the possible impact it will have on the individual's life; and (6) Develop a core-values framework for leadership and decision-making.

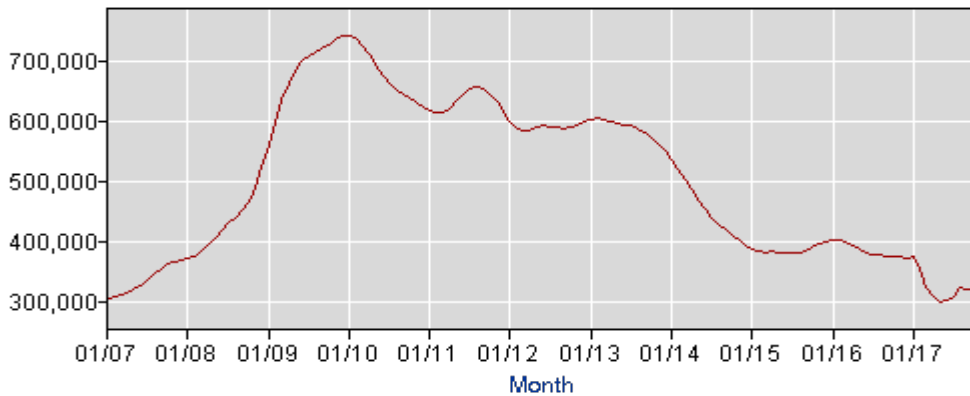
Approximately 65% of our students are females. Student grade point average is steady each semester at an average of approximately 3.15. The average student graduates with roughly 135 semester hours of credit. Over 90% of our students reside in Illinois. According to alumni surveys, approximately 40% of our students continue their education beyond a bachelor's degree.

## 6. Major Findings and Recommendations

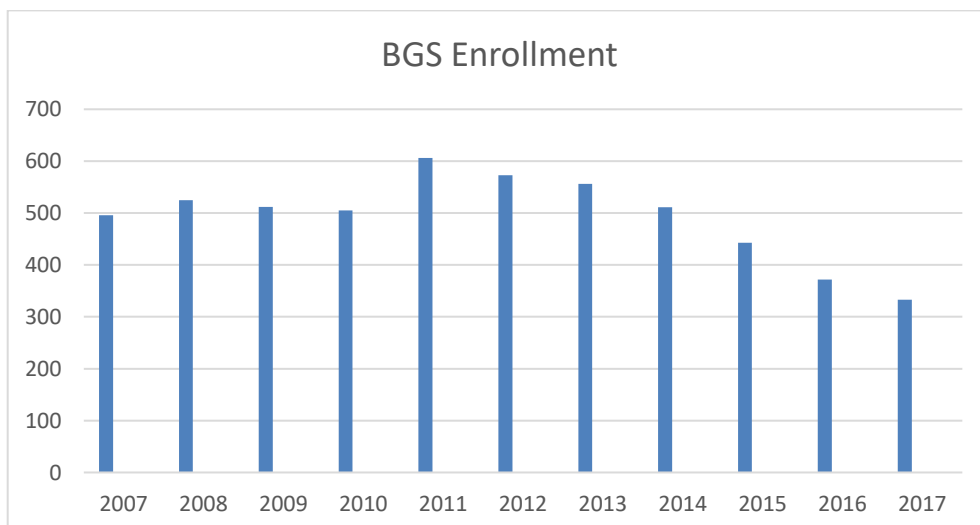
a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program/disciplinary context, e.g., (1) changes in the overall discipline or field; (2) student demand; (3) societal needs; (4) institutional context for offering the degree; (5) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question; and (6) other.

- (1) Because the BGS program is a multi-disciplinary degree, allowing each individual student to build a program based on his/her needs, commenting on any one discipline is not appropriate for our degree.
- (2) Similar to other adult education programs, the BGS program often reflects the current state of the economy. When the economy is weak, our enrollment tends to grow. A solid economy with high employment, typically causes a decrease in our enrollments. Below are two graphs. The first graph illustrates the unemployment data for Illinois from 2007-2017 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) and second graph illustrates the program enrollments for the same years.

unemployment



BGS Enrollment



- (3) While the data above is telling about the impact of employment on enrollments, the need for adult-focused opportunities for higher education continues to grow. According to the National Student Research Clearinghouse (2014), there are more than 31 million people in the United States with some college credit who have not completed a degree. There are many benefits to earning a bachelor's degree including higher earnings and lower unemployment rates. In spite of these advantages, adults often find it difficult to continue their education due to the multiple priorities they must manage. The B.A. in General Studies removes many of the barriers to completing a degree. Students may transfer in up to 100 semester hours, including as many as 78 semester hours of community college credit. This, along with prior learning assessment, supports the adult learner by validating his/her previous learning and saving both time and money to degree completion.
- (4) Over the past several years we have seen a higher demand for online courses. The various departments at Eastern Illinois University have responded to this need by offering more of their courses online. Since 1972, EIU has been committed to serving adults who cannot change their lives to attend college. We continue to do so through our online courses, as well as face-to-face classes at off-site locations at Parkland College, the University Center of Lake County, Triton College, and Forest View Educational Center at School District 214.

**b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement.**

An exit survey is sent to our graduates each semester since 2012. Over 95% of the respondents, stated they would recommend our program to a friend or colleague. One concern expressed by alumni responding to the survey has been the lack of variety of online courses. This has improved as academic departments have added more online courses, and this issue did not come up in the past year's results.

Students are assessed each year on learning goals through various assignments in the three required BGS courses. It is expected that at least 80% of our students will meet or exceed learning goals identified through the various assignments. These expectations have been met or exceeded over the past several years, except in two areas. In both cases, these data were used to enhance instruction, and the goals were achieved the following semesters.

**c. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.**

Several changes have been made to the program since the last review. In 2009, we began offering the B.A. in General Studies with an option in child care education. This 60-semester hour program is offered collaboratively between the School of Continuing Education and the School of Family and Consumer Sciences. This option is designed for non-traditional students who have completed an associate's degree focusing on child development, early childhood education, or a related field. At the conclusion of their course of study, graduates are prepared to qualify for the Early Childhood Professional Level IV, as identified by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Illinois Director Credential, as identified by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. The Option in Child Care Education meets the qualifications of the Illinois Director's Credential as an entitled program.

In 2012, a survey was mailed to alumni of the BGS program who graduated between 2006 and 2011. Ninety-one percent of these respondents indicated they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their education in the B.A. in General Studies. Four percent indicated their opinion of the degree was neutral, while 5% rated it as poor. Some who rated their experience as poor noted the lack of ability to establish themselves in a career. Unfortunately, this happens for college graduates who go into a traditional major as well, but the perception of these alumni appeared to be that choosing a general studies degree was holding them back. The lack of understanding by these graduates of how to promote their degree in general studies in the workplace when seeking new jobs and/or promotions, coupled with the need to develop a more solid assessment of student learning for Eastern Illinois University's Office of Student Assessment, led to the revision of the two required BGS courses, and the addition of a third required course.

These courses were strategically designed to answer this alumni feedback, as well as to respond to comments being made in the popular press and research articles of the need for a workforce with the following skills: communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. These three BGS courses were also designed to be consistent with the learning goals at EIU. They are: BGS 2985, Adults in Transition; BGS 3002, Critical Thinking and the Adult Learner; and BGS 4001, Self-Directed Leadership.

The BGS program, for the most part, relies on the instructional resources of other departments and their willingness to teach off-campus and online, as they offer the majority of the courses our students enroll in each semester. The BGS department offers 4 courses, 3 of which are required. In addition to a full-time annually contracted (Unit B) faculty member hired since the previous review, BGS courses are taught by professional staff, program advisors, and adjunct or part-time faculty.

**d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of the review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.**

A university-wide committee was formed to create a three-year rotating schedule of all classes, including off-campus and online classes. This helps advisors and students know when courses will be offered and provides a variety of course offerings not only to on-campus students but students enrolled online and off-campus as well.

**7. Responses to Institution-Assigned Issues**

**a. What strategies has the department implemented that will support the Integrative Learning Experience at EIU?**

The vast amount of experience adults bring to the classroom embraces the very essence of integrated learning. Experiential learning, or the knowledge our adult students have acquired through their experiences outside the classroom, is itself integrative learning. The interdisciplinary nature of the BGS degree builds on learners' previous experiences and helps to create a meaningful educational experience. We acknowledge the learning that has taken place outside the classroom by welcoming students to submit learning essays for evaluation by EIU faculty for college credit. We also encourage students to take CLEP and DSST exams for areas of expertise where they have not been awarded previous college credit.

The BGS courses require students to examine their experiences and the impact they have on their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The three required courses are writing intensive, providing students the opportunity to improve their writing skills. Projects included in the courses require self-evaluation and creating a plan for growth in their careers. The capstone course requires a presentation that students post on YouTube. This hones their presentation skills and provides an opportunity to use technology. A fourth BGS course, BGS 3001, Prior Learning Portfolio, guides students' development of materials for evaluation by faculty and subject matter specialists for academic credit for college-level learning acquired outside the classroom.

**b. What one unique, noteworthy activity is the department involved with that will enable the IBHE to distinguish this program from similar programs in the state?**

The required sequence of three BGS courses is distinctive. These courses are the "golden thread" that ties the degree program together. While each student enrolled in this program will have a unique experience, depending on their individual experience and degree plan, these courses provide a context for goal setting, self-evaluation, and an opportunity for all students to examine their educational experience and its impact on their lives moving forward. The capstone requires a presentation where students "brand" themselves and identify their unique skills and abilities. These three courses build on each other (see listing in 6.c. above). They enhance critical thinking skills, providing opportunities for students to reflect on their unique experiences and identify strengths, along with opportunities for growth.

**8. Outcome**

**8.1 Decision**

- Program in Good Standing
- Program flagged for Priority Review
- Program Enrollment Suspended

I have reviewed the report and the BGS program serves a critical need in the region and across the state. Indeed, the program is aligned with IBHE priorities as they relate to workforce develop as well as PLAs. Additionally, the program's overall enrollment and degree productivity are exemplary.

Jay D. Gatrell, Ph.D.

Provost & VPAA