

ACADEMIC PROGRAM REVIEW

FOR

GENERAL STUDIES (733, 734)

Bachelor of General Studies  
Associate of General Studies

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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Academic Program Reviews

Bachelor of General Studies

Associate of General Studies

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## Instructional Program

### 1. Program Information

#### **A. Degree Programs Offered by the Unit**

The University College of Northwestern State University (NSU) offers the Bachelor of General Studies degree and the Associate of General Studies degree. These degree programs operate under the authority of the Louisiana Board of Regents and Louisiana Board of Supervisors. It follows the guidelines set by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Purpose. The bachelor degree program offers a broad and flexible general education program requiring a high level of self-design to accommodate individual abilities and career aspirations. According to the 2007-08 General Catalog, it is “especially appropriate for a mature person who has, as a result of various educational and work experiences, a clear focus and strong commitment to a particular course of study” (p. 117).

Baccalaureate of General Studies (BGS). In addition to the required University-wide core curriculum of 44 semester hours, the Baccalaureate of General Studies program requires courses within several areas of concentration. These areas include arts and communication, social sciences, computer and natural sciences, and other concentrations sponsored by various departments.

The BGS program requirement of 124 semester credit hours is typical for other bachelor degrees at Northwestern. It provides breadth that exceeds the University general education requirement, i.e. computer, psychology or sociology, and foreign language courses. It provides depth in the requirements of 36 hours in one area of

concentration and 18-27 hours in a minor area of study, many of these courses at the upper level of difficulty.

Associate of General Studies (AGS).

In addition to the required Board of Regents' required curriculum of 25 semester hours, the Associate of General Studies Program requires an academic concentration and two support groups. The concentration and enrichment groups are selected from applied sciences, art, business, computer and natural sciences, and social/behavioral sciences. Other available concentrations are aviation science and child development, which are sponsored by departments in other colleges.

The program requirement of 63 semester credit hours is typical for other associate degrees at the University. The AGS follows closely the Board of Regents requirements for two-year degrees.

**B. Description of Academic Unit**

The General Studies programs reside within University College. Its Dean reports to the Associate Provost of Academic Affairs and Institutional Accountability and to the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs. The College is structured on the national model for university colleges which grant the General Studies degrees. Its academic support unit is Academic Advising and Disability Services, in which is located an Advising Center. It also houses a TRIO Student Support Services program.

**C. Findings and Recommendations Made During Other Reviews**

Northwestern reviewed internally the General Studies degrees in 1980 and 1981, under the direction of the Board of Regents. It reviewed the degree again in 1984-1985

for action by its Curriculum Review Committee. The programs were reviewed in 1995 and 2007 in the Reaffirmation of Accreditation Self Study for the SACS. In general, the recommendations were that curricular content should match current practices in the field of specialization, and that unit goals should be based on the University Mission Statement.

University College conducted a self-study and external review in 1999-2000, which resulted in a five-year strategic plan of action for improvement. A review was conducted for the SACS site visit in 2007, which resulted in a generally positive assessment of University programs, including the General Studies program.

2. Specific Program Information

**A. Exact Designation of Program**

The approved CIP code designation is 240102.

**B. Curriculum Templates for Each Degree Program, Major and Option**

Curriculum templates for each degree program appear in the University Catalog (2007-08 University Catalog, p. 117). These are here attached (Appendix A). A check-list to monitor individual student progress is found at the University College website:

<http://www.nsula.edu/universitycollege/degree.asp>

a. Course Listings

The subject area courses offered by the General Studies program are provided in other departments. University College offers the following courses: Orientation 1010, 1030, 1100, and 2000; Academic Study Skills 1010 and 1020; Tutoring 1010, 1020, and 2010; and Interdisciplinary Studies 2000, 3000, and 4010. These courses may be taken by students in all majors.

b. Strengths/unique features

One of the strengths of the General Studies program is the quality of academic services and programs provided to undeclared students regarding majors and careers, and to lower division students completing the two-year General Studies degree. Another strength of the program is the production of individualized, cohesive degree programs for candidates for graduation in the baccalaureate degree. These features, which have doubled the average yearly completion rate for General Studies degrees in recent years, were the result of the implementation of University College in 1997.

c. Unit deficiencies and planned remedies

Each year since 1997, three full-time and one part-time professional advisors in General Studies have handled a workload varying from 800-1200 students. An advisor position not filled since 2003 is urgently needed. There has been an increase in the number of adult learners and/or distance learners who are interested in the General Studies major; moreover, these students need advising and tutoring online.

A proposed remedy is to elevate the coordinator of academic advising to the position of director of General Studies, and to hire an advisor who will also coordinate disability services. Another remedy is to hire an adjunct advisor/instructor to assist with the advising challenges during peak times. Still another remedy is to acquire software that assists in meeting these special needs.

d. Alternative delivery of instruction

Both the bachelor degree and the associate degree in General Studies are available electronically. Both degrees have been approved by the SACS for distance delivery.



Some sections of the orientation and interdisciplinary studies courses are delivered by internet each semester.

### **C. Current Areas of Concentration**

There are multiple concentrations within the Bachelor of General Studies, including the following three groups – arts and communication, social sciences, and computer and natural sciences. Additional concentrations sponsored by various departments include aviation science, Creole studies, communication, defense leadership, nonprofit leadership, and professional studies. See University Catalog (p. 118) and attachment (Appendix B).

Another concentration in web design and development is currently under review by unit curriculum committees. The concentration group offerings may need to continue to evolve in order to meet the demands of students and the economy.

### **D. Accreditation status**

There is no accrediting agency for General Studies.

## **3. Program Objectives**

### **A. Statement of Program Objectives**

This program is designed to provide a flexible degree plan, and to prepare students for graduate study or careers. It recognizes the value of special programs for individuals with unusual backgrounds and abilities; it provides flexibility to allow the student's program to adapt to particular interests and career goals; and it provides a clear focus and strong commitment to a particular course of study. It is designed especially for a mature person who has various educational and work experiences.

## **B. Relationship to Existing Institutional Mission**

Northwestern State University is “a responsive, student-oriented institution that is committed to the creation, dissemination, and acquisition of knowledge through teaching, research, and service...[which] prepares its students to become productive members of society and promotes economic development and improvements in the quality of life of the citizens in its region” (2007-08 University Catalog, p. 8). The General Studies program, through its structured, thematic approach, aims to provide in students a broad foundation in academics, a lifelong appreciation for the liberal arts, sciences, and humanities, and preparation for careers.

### 4. Desired Learning Objectives

#### **A. Expected Learning Outcomes**

University core competencies. General Studies majors will obtain knowledge and abilities from the core curriculum that are appropriate for all Northwestern students.

These core values represent the breadth of their educational programs and are as follows:

- To communicate effectively in oral and written English
- To read with comprehension
- To reason abstractly and think critically
- To use numerical data and statistics
- To apply the scientific method
- To apply key technological and informational applications
- To acquire skills needed to learn independently
- To know the nature of cultural diversity
- To know the nature and value of the visual and performing arts
- To acquire skills needed to develop a personal value system
- To explain the American political and economic system
- To acquire knowledge and skills needed for healthy behaviors and improving the quality of life
- To increase students’ knowledge of international education through the study of the arts and culture of other countries

The assessments of these core values were coordinated through the Office of University Planning and Assessment during the past four regular semesters, from fall 2005 through spring 2007. The aggregated results represent those students who were enrolled in the specific courses in which core competencies were assessed during a particular semester. This information can be viewed at the following website addresses:

<http://sacs.nsula.edu/display/degree.aspx?code=Core&year=2005>; and

<http://sacs.nsula.edu/display/degree.aspx?code=Core&year=2006>

Subject area competencies. General Studies majors receive a broad general education with emphasis in subject areas that prepare them for work or further study. These areas are written communication and mathematical computations (BGS and AGS) and science reasoning (BGS only), which are assessed through the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) instrument. These assessments are presented as mean subscale scores for fall and spring administrations, which are available for the past four academic years, 2003–2007.

General Studies majors perform about a point or two lower than total NSU students on each of the subscale areas. The scores are generally not significantly different, as most are in the range of 55-62 on a test score scale of 40 (low) to 80 (high). It is difficult to draw conclusions from the data because of the low number of responses for each subscale area, e.g. 19-25 BGS students and 12-21 AGS students in fall 2005. See attached CAAP scores matrix for the subject areas for the 2003-2007 and also the fall 2005 results in the Continuous Improvement Plans (Appendix C). The effect of these lower scores has not been determined, but apparently they do not hinder students' persistence and completion.

Major-specific competencies. General Studies baccalaureate students are required to develop competencies in three subject areas beyond the core curriculum. The areas are computer, psychology or sociology, and foreign language, and are intended as follows:

- To build in students a strong foundation for further college coursework
- To prepare students for life and study in a pluralistic society.

Competency in these areas is assessed by successful completion of the above courses.

Concentration/minor area competencies. General Studies candidates for the baccalaureate degree receive depth of education through the special requirements of the concentration in the major and the minor area of study. These requirements are also intended to prepare them with knowledge and skills in a focused academic area. The requirements are 36 semester credit hours in a chosen field of concentration within the major and an 18-27 semester credit hour minor area of study, many of which will be at the upper level (45 hours required). Competency in these areas is assessed by successful completion of courses in the major and minor areas.

Competency in the concentration and minor areas is also defined as preparation of students for work or further study. The learning objectives are as follows:

- To prepare graduates for advanced training or pursuit of a graduate degree
- To prepare graduates for a career in their chosen areas.

These objectives are assessed in follow-up data on the students' attitudes concerning preparation for advanced training or pursuit of a graduate degree, as indicated by two responses on the major field portion of the Graduating Senior Survey (GSS). An analysis was conducted for graduating seniors in the 2005 and 2006 years collectively, who responded to the statement "I am prepared for advanced training or pursuit of a

graduate degree.” A mean of 3.92 (5 point scale) was interpreted as slightly less than agreement that they were adequately prepared for advanced training or graduate study.

The same group of graduating seniors also responded to the statement “I am prepared for a career (in my degree program/academic concentration area).” A overall average mean score of 4.41 (5 point scale) was interpreted as agreement that they were prepared for a career in their fields. The student response rates on this test were fewer than the number of graduates for the years 2005 and 2006; thus, these measures of effectiveness are not very conclusive. See GSS mean scores for items 99 and 102 for four test administrations, spring 2005 through fall 2006 (Appendix D).

## 5. Program Structure

### A. Rationale

The Bachelor of General Studies is sequenced so that the student’s academic maturity increases as levels of course difficulty increase. Beginning in year three, the candidate takes additional hours in the chosen group of concentration, with at least 12 of these hours at the upper level in residence at NSU. All these courses are approved by the advisor and the General Studies Council.

The Associate of General Studies requirements were altered in fall 2004 to include more rigorous courses. There were increases of 6 semester credit hours of science and 6 semester credit hours of social/behavioral sciences, and a decrease to 3 semester credit hours of mathematics. These changes were made to bring the degree in line with Board of Regents requirements for associate degrees.

## **B. Breadth of Coverage**

The wide range of academic courses in the liberal arts, social sciences, and natural sciences promotes breadth across several areas. Within the chosen concentration group, baccalaureate students have broad exposure to multiple disciplines and diverse faculty. Over the past six years the most popular concentrations of graduates have been social sciences (47%), arts and humanities (26%), and computer and natural sciences (22%). Within the chosen minor area of study, they have more specific exposure to a discipline and its faculty. Over the past six years the most popular minors of graduates have been social sciences and English.

In addition to breadth in the liberal arts and sciences, students are also encouraged to develop content- and work-related competencies. These competencies are attained through elective courses such as cooperative occupations experience, college-to-work transition skills, service learning, internship, and certification courses and programs.

## **C. External Relationships**

University College has developed relationships with employers in area nonprofits and other businesses and industries to place senior students in internships in their chosen fields. Some of the nonprofit agencies in these relationships are Boys and Girls Club, DOVES, Cane River Children's Services, North Louisiana Legal Services, Boy Scouts of America, Sabine Parish Tourism Commission, Women's Resource Center, Natchitoches Dixie Youth, Natchitoches Parish Library, and several others. University College also has entered relationships with area employers to place a few lower division students in service learning experiences in the field. Some of these employers include Natchitoches Parish Health Unit, Women's Resource Center, and NSU Head Start Center.

6. Need

**A. Similar Programs Nearby**

Bachelor degrees in General Studies are offered at Louisiana State University at Alexandria, Louisiana State University at Shreveport, Louisiana Tech University, and Nicholls State University. The Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts is offered at Louisiana College. All these institutions have similar concentration requirements and range of required hours for these degrees (120-127 semester credit hours).

Associate of General Studies degrees are offered at Bossier Parish Community College, Louisiana State University at Eunice, and Nicholls State University. These institutions have similar general education and concentration requirements for their associate degrees (59-63 semester credit hours).

**B. Relationship with Other Programs**

All departmental faculty and courses in other programs at NSU are shared with the General Studies program. Faculty from eight departments are appointed to the General Studies Council, an advisory board. This link of cooperation among academic departments and programs provides better service to the baccalaureate degree.

Some General Studies administrators and faculty from nearby institutions participate in a national association, the Association for Deans and Directors of University Colleges and Undergraduate Studies. The annual conference and association listserv provide opportunities for Louisiana administrators to network concerning special aspects of the degree program.

### **C. Justification for Program Continuation**

Both of the programs serve students by preparing graduates for work in a variety of fields. They also serve the region well through production of college graduates. In the past decade, there has been an overall increase in student completion of the General Studies degree. For the past six years, over 10% of NSU graduates have earned a degree in General Studies. The growing popularity of on-line degrees, especially for adult students, has produced even greater opportunities for program access in the future. NSU has SACS approval for offering both degrees online.

There is justification for continuation of the two-year degree on a limited scale. In most regions community colleges have begun assuming authority in granting this degree. The closest nearby institution, Bossier Parish Community College at NSU, however, does not at this time fulfill a degree-granting role. The recent decline in AGS enrollment follows the trend away from the associate degree as a terminal degree at four-year institutions.

The programs may also be justified in terms of how well they serve the University in their high benefit/cost ratio. General Studies, in comparison with all NSU majors, is a low cost discipline, yet a high dollar producing major. For academic years 2003-2006 the average cost per FTE General Studies student (\$2495.93) was lower than that for other FTE students (\$2854.54). The average cost of educating a General Studies student thus was \$358.61 lower, while their financial benefit to the University was equal to that of other students. See the attached graphs summarizing these comparisons (Appendix E).



7. Student/clientele demand for the program

**A. Enrollment Statistics and Degrees Granted**

Enrollment. Total enrollments in the Bachelor and Associate degrees at NSU (duplicated students) were provided by Institutional Research for the past six fall semesters, 2001-2006. The General Studies enrollment contributed an average 9.4% of total baccalaureate degree enrollment, and an average 29.8% of total associate degree enrollment. General Studies has been in the top ten majors (for enrollment) over the past decade. The six year average enrollment total in the General Studies Degree Programs is 1248, with 636 in the BGS Degree and 612 in the AGS Degree. See attached tables displaying NSU undergraduate enrollment, and BGS and AGS enrollment and percentage of NSU enrollment (Appendix F).

General Studies enrollment lately has experienced a decline for several reasons. Most significant is the adoption in 2005 of the selective admissions policy, with the result that many of the academically under-prepared students (i.e., those who previously were admitted to the AGS degree) enrolled in Bossier Parish Community College at NSU or in other institutions. The academically better-prepared students now regularly admitted tend to select majors in the disciplines upon entering, rather than to select the exploratory or open option General Studies program. More information is needed to explain the recent decline in General Studies and in the overall decline in enrollment at NSU.

Degrees awarded. Whereas enrollment has experienced some decline, graduation rates in General Studies are noteworthy. In the years 2001-2006 the total number of undergraduate degrees awarded at NSU has increased about 19%, from 1196 to 1425.

The six year average of bachelor degrees awarded is 1033 students per year, and for the past three years, the number of bachelor degrees awarded (1061, 1088, 1052), has exceeded the six year average. The six year average of associate degrees awarded is 288 students per year, and last year the number of associate degrees awarded (373) exceeded the six year average.

The General Studies degree has contributed a large portion to this increase in NSU degree completion. It has ranked among the top ten majors of graduating students for the past six years. During that time General Studies degrees (unduplicated) have contributed a yearly average of 21.7% of all degrees awarded at NSU. The six year average of General Studies students (152) who earned four-year BGS degrees was 14.8% of total bachelor degrees at NSU. The six year average of two-year AGS degrees (125) was 43.9% of total associate degrees. See attached tables displaying total NSU degrees, and General Studies degrees awarded and percentages of total degrees awarded (Appendix F).

These indicators are evidence that advising and other processes for advancing students' matriculation through the programs have been highly successful in recent years. General Studies degrees awarded seem to have peaked in the years 2002-2004 and to be declining in the past three years. This downward trend is expected to continue as the selective admissions policy produces an academically better prepared student population. In addition, migration of under-prepared students to community colleges will continue to impact associate degree enrollments and completions at four-year institutions.

## **B. Education Aspirations of Participants**

Some General Studies students plan to go on immediately to pursue further higher education. Data from the Graduating Senior Survey reveal that about one-third of graduates responding planned to end their higher education with the bachelor's degree. About 30% of associate degree graduates intended to pursue a bachelor degree, and from 15-20% of baccalaureate degree students intended to pursue another bachelor degree, graduate degree, or certification.

Evidence of further education also may be found in the number of degrees earned following the initial graduation. Data on the subsequent degrees/certificates earned by all BGS and AGS degree earners over the past ten years were provided by Institutional Research. For 1440 total students who earned the BGS since 1997, over 20% completed another level of education, such as another bachelor degree (46), a teaching certification (110), a master's degree from NSU (93) or another institution (13), a degree from an out-of-state or private institution (29), and/or a doctoral degree (5). For 1007 students who earned the AGS in those years, over 42% completed a bachelor degree, with most of these in the same college (151) or another college (242) at NSU. See attached tables displaying subsequent degrees or certifications of program graduates (Appendix G).

## **C. Significant Characteristics of Clientele Served**

The student population of the General Studies program has varied little over time. For the fall 2007 population of 1007 students it is more female (59%) than male, more full-time (55%) than part-time, more baccalaureate (56%) than associate program or non-degree students, and more freshman and sophomores (46%) than junior and senior level

students (40%) or collegiate program students. There are more whites (61%) than blacks (29%) or other-race students, more traditional (61%) than non-traditional (defined as over age 25) students, and more off-campus (92%) than on-campus students. About half of the students have jobs working 21 or more hours per week, and very few (6%) have ever resided in the residence halls.

#### **D. Recruitment and Admission Policies and Practices**

Freshman and sophomore students who are undetermined about a major field are placed in the General Studies major as exploratory students. These students were recruited for Northwestern through the recruiting office and departmental telemarketing program. Many of these students earn the AGS as a secondary major while pursuing a baccalaureate degree in a primary major in another discipline at Northwestern. This practice has encouraged persistence for certain students and sometimes financial assistance in the form of eligibility for a part-time job.

Upper division students are usually referred by a faculty member or self-recruited into the program. Baccalaureate degree candidates file a plan of study through the interdepartmental General Studies Council (GSC). The Council has admission policies that ensure rigor and quality and that justify the award of a degree, including a 2.0 grade point average for admission to candidacy and two semesters of residence in the degree program. The Council reviews requested waivers of these policies on an individual basis.

#### **E. Attrition Record**

The fall 2006 cohort of General Studies (exploratory) majors experienced a 36% attrition rate (64% persistence rate). Of those persisting to fall 2007, 31.3% were

retained in the major and 46.8 % were retained in the University. For full-time students alone, the General Studies group experienced slightly higher persistence (67.77%) than did total NSU students (65.73%). University College rated among the top three Colleges in student persistence at NSU. See persistence rates for undergraduates (Appendix J).

#### **F. Manpower Data That the Program Addresses**

Follow-up data are not collected on the proportion of program completers choosing particular occupations or on their career progress. Data on job opportunities at the state and national level are not collected. A study of the one-third of graduates who complete alternate teacher certification and become teachers would be a good beginning to collection of manpower data.

#### 8. Information and projections regarding resource requirements

##### **A. Resource Requirements**

General Studies is a boon to NSU because it is a relatively low-cost discipline. For the previous three years, average yearly instructional cost per full-time equivalent (FTE) General Studies student was lower by \$358.61 than for all FTE undergraduates at NSU. This amount represented substantial cost saving, while benefit to the University remained constant. These instruction costs include salaries, benefits, operating expenses, and other prorated instructional expenses. Most of the costs for faculty and some staff for the program are located in other units of the University.

The General Studies program requires a Dean, an administrative assistant, a coordinator, and three full-time advisors and a part-time advisor. Additional allocations are needed for graduate assistants (3 at present) and student workers (18 at present) because of the additional campus-wide academic success initiatives.

## **B. Undergraduate Courses Taught**

University College instructors teach courses that benefit the general population of students. These include academic study skills for developmental students and orientation for first-year students. They teach interdisciplinary studies courses in service learning and professional studies, and tutoring courses for student tutors in several departments.

## **C. Shifts in Resources Over Time**

The operating budget for the degree program has remained at about the same level since the inception of University College in 1997. Approximately one-half the annual operating budget for academic enhancement, or about \$5000, goes to support the two academic programs. The Dean of University College serves as the *de facto* department head of General Studies about half-time. The administrative assistant contributes about three-fourths time to General Studies.

At present there are an advising administrator, two additional professional advisors, and a part-time (1/10) advisor who also directs the Student Support Services program. The unit lost one advisor position three years ago and has since been working beyond capacity for its allocation of staff resources. These advisors have additional responsibilities such as graduation clearance and coordination of several retention initiatives, as well as the primary responsibility for advising adult learners in professional studies. All these duties have further strained capacity of the unit.

## **D. Use of Part-Time Faculty**

One part-time faculty member is team-teaching the interdisciplinary studies course, foundations in professional studies, for transfer students in the BGS program. Adjunct instructors/advisors may have to be utilized should resources for a permanent advisor position not be made available.

9. Student follow-up information

**A. Satisfaction with Educational Experience**

Student satisfaction with the program is assessed each semester through portions of the Graduating Senior Survey (GSS), which is administered to General Studies baccalaureate graduates prior to commencement. The instrument assesses satisfaction of the majors for the academic experience over-all, and for the experience in the major, as indicated in a response set of questions somewhat more specific to general education studies. Responses of the graduates are below summarized for the previous seven semesters, spring 2005 through spring 2007. See attached reports (Appendix D).

- Question 8. Selecting NSU if They Were to Select Again. Over three-fourths (7.2%) of the respondents (170/220) would probably or absolutely still choose NSU;
- Question 13. The Quality of Academic Programs. Just over half (51.2%) of the respondents (83/162) perceived the quality of programs to be above average or excellent; and
- Question 68. Quality of Instruction in Your Major. Approximately 80% of respondents (n = 213) indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their quality of instruction within the major.

Regarding their general perceptions of the environment at NSU (questions 13-25), all the cohort groups collectively had average or better perceptions about NSU relating to factors such as school friendliness, quality of the faculty and academic program, class size and learning environment, and cost of attending, but below average perceptions in the area of the residence halls. Relative to their level of satisfaction with academic

services, areas or facilities at NSU (questions 67-80), all the groups were quite satisfied with the quality of academic services and facilities, instruction in the major, and the accessibility of instructors.

### **B. Relevance of the Program to Career Choice**

Responses concerning the extent to which a planned or secured job was related to the student's major were also analyzed in the 2005-2007 GSS. Students were more positive about the job-major relationship than they were about repeating the same major.

- Question 4. Relation of Job (planned or obtained) to Major Area of Study. More respondents (45.5%) overall in GSS administrations said the degree was somewhat or directly related to job attained, than students (38%) who said not related; and
- Question 9. Selecting the Same Major if They Were to Begin College Again. Fewer students (35.7%) responded positively to this item than students (43.2%) who responded negatively to selecting the same major again.

Many students were already working in full- or part-time jobs, and some did not know the types of jobs awaiting them. These results need further investigation, given the inconsistencies with quite positive results in the next section.

### **C. Contribution of the Program to Career and Personal Goals**

Graduating General Studies majors also responded to questions about their personal and professional growth from experiences while at NSU. The following responses were somewhat more relevant to personal achievement in terms of knowledge and goal attainment.



- Question 38. Increasing Knowledge in Chosen Academic Field. Almost 90% of respondents collectively (n = 213) were agreed indicated that NSU had given them some help or very much help in increased knowledge; and
- Question 40. Completing Degree or Certification Requirements. Almost 90% of total respondents (n = 213) agreed that NSU had given them some help or very much help in degree completion.

Over the past seven administrations of the GSS, students graduating in General Studies generally felt they gained some at NSU in all of the areas of growth, and that they gained much in independence and responsibility, as well as in understanding one's own abilities. They were divided in agreement that NSU experiences helped them to acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes that prepared them for responsible behaviors as educated adults.

#### **D. Student Retention, Drop-out, Transfer, and Completion Rates**

Retention and drop-out rates are within the acceptable range. The student persistence rate for General Studies for 2006-2007 was 64% (36% attrition), in comparison with 73% (27% attrition) for total NSU students. See attached report of rates for degree-seeking undergraduates (Appendix H). For full-time students only, General Studies experienced slightly higher persistence (68%) than total NSU students (66%) and was among the top three colleges in student persistence.

A 1998-2006 report of departments where students finished degrees showed that almost 16% of total graduates (9239) entered in General Studies. Of 1447 students who first started as undeclared majors, 605 (41.8%) completed in General Studies. The other 842 students (58%) who started in General Studies completed a degree in another

discipline such as business (163) or social sciences (107). The program thus served to assist lower division students in selecting the appropriate majors; success was completion of any NSU degree. The program also served transfers from other NSU majors; success was retention and completion at NSU. In the 1998-2006 report, 1123 of total 1728 graduates in General Studies (35%) transferred from majors in other colleges such as education (259), business (179), and nursing (187). See attached matrix of frequencies for these interdepartmental transfers (Appendix I).

Completion rates are low for General Studies and Northwestern in general. Results of the study of 6-year graduation rates by departments for the 2001 cohort of NSU students are here reported (Appendix J). The overall six-year graduate rate for this cohort of full-time degree-seeking entering first-year students is 22.34% for General Studies (down from 29.22% for 2000 cohort). This rate is compared with 33.74% for all department students. The percentage dropped probably because General Studies, and in particular the associate degree, became the forced choice of major for students who did not meet the basic admission requirements, and who were thus the most at risk of graduating.

#### **E. Time to Program Completion**

The completion data for 1998-2006 reveal that almost 42% of the students first enrolling in General Studies completed General Studies within six years. The other 58% completed degrees in other departments within six years. This report does not address the number completing after six years or never completing.

Completion data for BGS candidates are kept internally in the department. About 80% of those admitted to candidacy graduate within three semesters following the filing

of the program of study, and an additional 5% complete the program within four or five semesters. Over 90% of juniors and seniors admitted to candidacy for the baccalaureate degree program complete the degree.

10. Strengths and long-term potential of the program

**A. Quality of Curricular Offering**

The General Studies curriculum at Northwestern is of comparable quality to other university programs nearby. The bachelor's program requires 124 semester credit hours, which is 3 hours fewer than some other programs. Several of its program requirements exceed the general education core, i.e. 6 hours of foreign language, 1-3 hours of computer, 3 hours of Psychology or Sociology, a minor area of study, and also exceed those of all other near-by programs. The baccalaureate program is more accessible for students than the program offered by LSU-A, for example, because of the availability of more upper level courses offered each semester and more courses offered online.

The associate program is also of comparable quality to that of nearby institutions. It requires more semester credit hours (63) as compared with the nearest two-year program at Bossier Parish Community College (59). The NSU program requires a social science core course, while the BPCC program requires a computer course. The programs are very similar, and articulation agreements between these institutions ensure the maximum transfer of BPCC courses into the four-year NSU programs.

**B. Special Competencies of Existing Faculty**

Dean Weaver teaches educational leadership in the College of Education and interdisciplinary studies in University College. She and three part-time instructors have

expertise in nonprofit organizations, service learning, and prior learning assessment. Each of the instructors has the master or specialist degree in areas related to counseling, psychology, educational technology, or educational administration.

### **C. Quality of Students**

Northwestern has been a selective admissions university since 2005. Currently, students fall within a wide range of ACT scores (10-28), although average ACT composites scores have been rising since selective admissions was implemented. The eight-year average of mean ACT composite score for entering General Studies students was calculated. In both degree programs the ACT was 18.03, in comparison with 19.74 for all Northwestern students. On average, General Studies students have ACT scores that are about a point lower for baccalaureate students and for associate students, in comparison respectively with these groups of total NSU students. See attached charts of ACT scores and grade point averages (Appendix K).

For 2004-2007, General Studies students in the baccalaureate and associate degree programs earned a cumulative grade point average of about 2.56, compared with 2.80 for students in all NSU degrees. This difference is slight and not statistically significant. General Studies students have grade point averages that are within the range for all NSU students in their respective degree programs.

General Studies students also scored almost as well as NSU students on the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) examinations. A summary of CAAP results for these students and total NSU students presented earlier (Appendix C) showed that each of the scaled scores on writing, mathematics, and science were lower (about 1.5) for General Studies than for total NSU students. Tests of statistical

significance for these differences in CAAP Scores were not conducted. These results did not thus distinguish General Studies students from their other-major counterparts in the CAAP performance.

#### **D. Quality of Academic Support**

Equipment, including computer technologies, is adequate for the program. All advisors/instructors have personal computers on their desks that are connected to the University system and also have Internet access. A software program, AdvisorTrac, allows them to monitor student progress, and its companion program, SurveyTrac, allows them to assess the effectiveness of the advising program.

#### **E. Outside Evaluations of Program**

The reviews during the 1995 and 2007 site visits by SACS were generally favorable, although specific evaluative information was not provided. The earliest external evaluation report that is available is the Response to Recommendations, General Studies Program for the 1983 Statewide Committee Report on General Studies. This report recommended classifying degree-seeking General Studies majors differently from exploratory majors, and also recommended contact between General Studies representatives from all universities having General Studies programs. These recommendations were not followed but are still relevant today.

The most recent external evaluation report is the 2000 report by a consultant, Dr. Patricia Richard of Ohio University. The status report for a strategic plan of activities for the years 2000-2005 is attached (Appendix L). This report recommended, among other things, implementing on-line degree programs for the BGS and AGS, developing courses

for the senior capstone experience, and developing evidence about placement and success of graduates. The first two of these recommendations were followed.

## **II. Students**

### **1. Advisement and counseling**

The quality of academic advising for the baccalaureate and associate programs is adequate at this time. Each of the professional advisors has a very high advising load, however, and all have additional instructional and programmatic responsibilities. The load of 390 students per advisor is calculated on the six year average enrollment of 1248 in BGS and AGS programs and 3.2 advisors. A portion of these General Studies advisees also have secondary faculty advisors in their minor fields and/or other academic counselors at the Leesville, Alexandria, or other satellite campus.

NSU provides career counseling upon request for all its students, through the Counseling and Career Services unit located in the Student Union. This office provides information about career choices; development of skills for writing the resume, cover letter, and career development plans; development of job interviewing skills; personal counseling; and topical seminars such as time and stress management and healthy and substance-free lifestyles. The unit developed a course uniting these services in a capstone course, Student Personnel Services 4000, that is valuable for graduating seniors, the majority of whom are General Studies majors. The career services are expected to be expanded in 2008 with the implementation of the Quality Enhancement Program—Academic and Career Enhancement (ACE).

At summer Freshman Connection and the fall Convocation for exploratory

General Studies students, information is presented about the advisement and counseling opportunities available from program staff and also from faculty in other departments. Students participate in the fall Majors Fair and are expected to select a major area or at least a minor area of study. Those still undecided about a major after 45 semester credit hours are advised to take the career decision-making course Orientation 1030: Education and Vocational Guidance. Upper division General Studies students are urged to participate in the annual Teacher Job Fair, Summer Job Fair, Career Day, Graduate Day, and other activities related to career choice. Senior level students are advised to take the cooperative education course, internship or field experience, and/or a senior capstone experience course to bolster preparation for their chosen careers.

## **2. Financial support**

Most General Studies students take advantage of financial aid, including Pell Grants, Stafford Loans and other student loans, TOPS scholarships and other scholarships, and student work study. Still others have athletic and music scholarships, and most of them work full-time or part-time. Many of the scholarship recipients are lower division students. Financial aid information for the category of General Studies students is not available.

For the years 2004-2006, the average number of unduplicated students receiving financial aid was 9515. For each of the three years, the average total of dollars for all types of financial aid was \$57,593,184. Types of assistance were federal funds, state funds, institutional funds, tuition waivers, and other aid. A chart of this information is attached (Appendix M).

### **3. Follow-up and student placement**

The University does not have a placement or graduate follow-up mechanism in place. It is expected these will be forthcoming in the ACE initiative beginning in 2008.

### **4. Enrollment capacity**

Enrollment in General Studies is at capacity for the current allocation of program staff, facilities, and operating funds. Over a ten year period, the enrollment in General Studies has fluctuated widely, depending on first-year student placement policies during the transition to selective admissions. At present there are fewer first-year students entering General Studies, which may be expected given entrants with higher academic ability and given fewer students overall entering NSU. The number of transfers to General Studies from other disciplines has remained constant, and adult student transfers from other institutions are on the rise. An increase in on-line only students is also expected, given the SACS-sanctioned distance learning delivery of the BGS and AGS degrees at NSU.

### **5. Anticipated changes**

Some additional faculty and staff resources will have to be allocated to handle the advising and counseling needs of the additional adult and online students. A recent administrative restructuring placed Student Affairs under the Academic Affairs division of the University. The General Studies advisors and their Student Affairs counterparts are expected to collaborate even more than ever before, especially for initiatives under the ACE program.



### **III. Personnel (Faculty-Staff)**

#### **1. Faculty who are direct participants in the program**

Faculty for subject matter courses have their faculty appointments in the respective departmental units, and thus participate indirectly in the program. Salaries and tenure policies are thus not applicable for General Studies.

#### **2. Staffing changes**

General Studies staffing has changed only with the loss of the professional advisor in 2003. There was a need for a director of General Studies that was expressed in the 2000 evaluation report but that need has not been met at this time. There is a need for a receptionist in the Academic Center.

#### **3. Support or advisory faculty**

The General Studies Council is a policy-making and advisory body which governs the BGS program. It represents a cross section of several departments from most of the academic Colleges. The following members are on the Council:

Dr. Sue W. Weaver, Chair	General Studies
Dr. Frank Fuller	Adult and Continuing Education
Dr. Elizabeth Cole	Mathematics
Dr. Marietta LeBreton	History
Dr. Mike Land	Biological Science
Steve Hicks	Academic Advising
Fleming Thomas	Library
Claudia Triche	Social Work
Tony Smith	Creative and Performing Arts

#### **4. Current support staff**

The following advisors, counselors and other support staff have full- or part-time responsibility for students in the exploratory and degree-seeking populations:

Steve Hicks, Coordinator	Academic Advising and Disability Services
Steven Gruesbeck	Advisor, Coordinator of Academic Center
Terence Vinson	Advisor
Don Barker	Director, Student Support Services; Advisor
DeAnna Shirley	Administrative Secretary
Rebecca Boone, Coordinator	Counseling and Career Services
Stephanie Boyt	Continuing Education
Peggy Lodridge	Counselor, Cenla Center
Juanita Darby	Counselor, Leesville Center
Robert Triplett	Counselor, Leesville Center

Resumes of the advisors and the curriculum vita of the Dean are here attached (Appendix N).

#### **IV. Informational resources/facilities and equipment**

##### **1. Library resources**

Library support is adequate for the general education component and for the disciplines which serve the General Studies programs. The institution is served by three libraries collectively referred as the Watson Libraries including the main campus library and three branch libraries. The combined holdings for the libraries include 234,719 books, 83,928 bound journals, government documents, and subscriptions to 1,376 journals and 70 online databases. Print journals are being replaced with electronic versions.

Students and faculty at the campuses have research and instruction services available to them. A toll free telephone number is provided for research inquiries and assistance. Handbooks are available to supplement class lectures. The Watson Libraries are rendering support consistent with the academic programs offered at each location. The findings of the compliance review may be found in core requirement 2.9 of the 2007 SACS Revised Focused Report (Appendix O).

##### **2. Current facilities and capital equipment**

Fixed and movable properties are less than adequate for administering the curriculum. The Dean's Office in 143 Kyser Hall has a dearth of space for storage of

student records and instructional equipment. The Academic Center in 239 Kyser Hall is too small for the program, as it is shared with students from all other departmental units and also with students from BPC at NSU. Technical equipment for the offices and study areas is currently adequate.

### **3. Needed additional equipment**

The Academic Center needs a reception area for a receptionist to handle student in-take, and also needs additional study space. The graduate assistants need designated office space and office equipment. Student tutors need space to store their books and other materials. University College needs a designated SMART classroom in Kyser Hall in which to conduct training for faculty and for students engaged in supplemental instruction. The Dean's Office needs a connected secure storeroom for storage of confidential student records and some office equipment.

### **4. Correcting resource deficiencies**

The operating fund for General Studies needs to be increased to the level of that available for other academic departments of its size. A department head or director of General Studies needs to be hired, along with a receptionist for the Academic Center.

Academic Advising and Disability Services need to be separated into two budget units and the budgets increased for each of the two units. A coordinator for each unit should be appointed who has responsibilities across all departmental units. Office and storage space for graduate assistants and student workers should be located nearby in Kyser Hall. The Dean's Office needs some simple restructuring to provide space for secure files.

## **V. Community service related to program goals**

### **1. Current activities**

General Studies students in the non-profit leadership certification program have provided service to youth-serving agencies through structured internships. These students were enrolled in Interdisciplinary Studies 4010: Internship. Some of these agencies include the Boys and Girls Club, Crisis Pregnancy Center, Special Olympics, Cane River Children's Services, and DOVES. A small number of General Studies majors in the service learning course have made contributions to the area around NSU and Natchitoches community, through various service projects such as food drives, church work, and heritage programs. These students were enrolled in Interdisciplinary Studies 2000: Service Learning.

### **2. Major program outcomes**

The outcomes of each of the internships in the non-profit agencies have been documented in 300 hours of volunteer work in areas related to volunteer management, budget and fiscal control, office procedures, board of directors interaction, and special events planning. Effectiveness of these internships is measured by midterm and final reviews of the documentation, conducted through on-site consultations with internship supervisors. The outcomes of the service learning activities are measured through independent evaluations of the projects. In one example, during the past several years the Helping Hands organization in the Student Support Services unit of University College has sponsored the heritage program, Black History. This program was awarded distinction by the Student Activities Board as the 2006-2007 Special Program of the Year and Most Outstanding Community Service project, and awarded a plaque and certification for the designations.

## **VI. Internal Mechanisms for Assessment**

### **1. Evaluation procedures**

There are internal assessments of the quality of instruction and of academic support in the General Studies programs. The Student Evaluation of Instruction instrument is administered each semester for the courses, and results are disseminated to the instructors and their administrators. The Dean or designee conducts a classroom visit each semester and, assisted by the instructor, prepares an evaluation report of the visit. The instrument used is the classroom visitation form from the Faculty Handbook. In addition, each advisor/instructor completes the annual Performance Planning and Review instrument which is used in setting goals, self-evaluation, and evaluation by their unit coordinators. The evaluation reports for the advisors and counselors are kept on file in the Dean's Office.

Until last year the unit conducted focus groups with graduating seniors using the Senior Exit Interview instrument. Four questions were posed regarding students' attitudes about NSU in general and the strengths and weakness perceived in matriculation through the program. The findings of the study were not analyzed in aggregate form and thus served primarily as anecdotal information that was shared with appropriate units.

The effectiveness of academic advising and counseling for General Studies students may be indicated by the number and quality of advising and tutoring contacts within the unit. Advisors use an advisor tracking software called AdvisorTrac to monitor contacts and document visits with their advisees. The companion software program, SurveyTrac, is an evaluation tool that allows students to evaluate electronically the quality of their advising sessions. This evaluation tool is being piloted in fall 2007.

Frequencies of advisor and tutor contacts for General Studies students are available also in the in-take information collected in the Academic Center. Analyses on these two types of data from the previous two years are currently being conducted.

The sufficiency of resources for the General Studies major is assessed annually through the budget preparation process. Strategic goals for the General Studies major and other University College sub-units are determined by staff at an annual staff retreat. These planning meetings are useful for identifying budget enhancements needed for the coming terms.

## **2. Use of results**

The Student Evaluation of Instruction and Classroom Visitation summaries are used in staff evaluation concerning instructional effectiveness, and become part of the annual Performance Planning and Review process for each instructor. The results are used in guiding the professional development of the instructors. The classroom evaluation is also used in yearly review of textbooks and syllabi. Any needed changes are addressed in the budget process and in the university curriculum review process. The role of General Studies in the curriculum process is enhanced by having two representatives on the university Curriculum Review Committee.

In one example of change, a Freshman Interest Group (FIG) was developed for General Studies exploratory students in order to create a learning community of this special group, and to focus on their special career decision-making needs. The class is being modified to increase the community engagement beyond the orientation course. In another example Academic Skills 1020, critical thinking and problem solving, evolved

from the recognized need for additional developmental course work for certain students.

Results experienced with the Academic Center in-take model, AdvisorTrac software, and tutoring certification have provided models for these programs in other Colleges at NSU. The College of Nursing implemented training initiatives and developed an advising center based on the success of General Studies in these areas. Departments such as Criminal Justice and Chemistry and Physics have also partnered with General Studies for advisor and tutor training.

## **VII. Recommendations Resulting from this Review**

Baccalaureate Degree Program. Continue the program. Strengthen it by making changes that will increase academic integrity and quality in student learning outcomes.

**1. Recommendation:** The General Studies majors in the exploratory program should be distinguished from degree-seeking General Studies majors. This distinction would assist in program monitoring and assessment. Students should be coded as 7340 (Open Option) until they select another major or, alternately, file a plan of study when they reach 60 semester credit hours. This category will include those undetermined about a major, completing developmental course requirements, or lacking the criteria for regular admission under the University's selected admissions policy.

The curriculum for all first-year students should be modified to include a mandatory first-year-experience (FYE) course replacing Orientation and Academic Study Skills. This 3 semester credit hours course should also include a service learning component that would bring personal growth, development, and other value to the first-year student.

The Freshman Interest Group (FIG) for Open Option students should be modified

to become more of a learning community. The FIG should pair the FYE course with an English and/or mathematics course to increase student interaction. The FIG should also be extended for a second semester to include the Orientation 1030 course, educational and vocational guidance, for those students still undecided about a major or minor.

**2. Recommendation.** The department-sponsored concentrations in General Studies should be analyzed for program viability. These represent only 5% of the groups of concentrations of graduating seniors. The very low enrollments in Defense Leadership and Nonprofit Leadership suggest that these concentrations should be modified to meet better the demands of the students and the economy, or should be discontinued. Sponsors of the new concentrations in Creole Studies and Communication should be actively recruiting students to make the programs viable. Any changes in status of these concentrations will be reviewed by the General Studies council and ultimately the University curriculum committee.

**3. Recommendation.** The Professional Studies concentration in General Studies should also be analyzed for program effectiveness. The nontraditional population of adult learners would benefit by a fast transition to courses in the minor area of study. For this population the requirement for general education courses should be reduced to 33 semester credit hours. This minimum requirement has been approved by the Board of Regents for the generic baccalaureate degree. A new degree such as Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree may need to be proposed as a replacement for the Professional Studies concentration in the BGS, to serve better these adult students.



**4. Recommendation.** A senior year experience course should be developed for traditional students in the BGS degree. This course will strengthen the final period of undergraduate education. The experience should be required for 1-3 hours of credit toward the degree (total: 124 hours) in a senior capstone course, internship, or cooperative occupations experience, and may also include a career planning seminar, senior service project, and achievement or recognition ceremony. This capstone experience would engender additional confidence in the readiness of BGS graduates for their intended careers.

Associate Degree Program. Continue the program. The mandated Board of Regents course requirements for associate degrees have added academic integrity and quality in terms of student learning outcomes.

**5. Recommendation.** Require also a computer course, as a necessary foundation for college coursework and preparation for life and work in society.

**6. Recommendation.** Have all students enrolled in the Associate of General Studies degree file a plan of study for the baccalaureate degree.

**7. Recommendation.** Study the future viability of the AGS. It should begin to be phased out when there are more community college options for this area in the future. It will still be available on a limited basis for special student circumstances.

#### Restructuring

**8. Recommendation.** An academic degree-granting Department of General Studies should be developed in University College. There should be an administrative base accompanied by a stable financial allocation of resources to fit the program. A department head and administrative assistant/secretary are needed to handle the large number of students in the two degree programs. This base will provide a foundation and

structure to support the needs of the academic degrees, such as conducting assessments and designing solutions that are appropriate for the student clientele.

**9. Recommendation.** Separate the current Academic Advising and Disability Services position into two distinct positions. Make the Coordinator of Academic Advising the Head of the Department of General Studies, and develop a Coordinator of Disability Services position using the academic advising position that was eliminated in 2004.

Hire an adjunct advisor to assist with advising the Professional Studies cohort of adult learners. This person should conduct advising online for the Electronic and Continuing Education division and also be affiliated with the Department of General Studies.

**10. Recommendation.** Analyze for effectiveness the retention programs currently serving General Studies first-year students and readmitted students. Restructure the Academic Center to become more central for students in all Northwestern programs. Cooperate fully with the Academic and Career Enhancement (ACE) initiative under the Quality Enhancement Plan approved by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

**11. Recommendation.** Study the feasibility of a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies degree. The mission of University College may need to be enhanced to include more programs and services for the adult learner and on-line only student populations.