

Request to Establish a Bachelor of Science in University Studies Degree Program at East Carolina University

East Carolina University requests authorization to establish a B.S. in University Studies degree program (CIP 24.0102).

Program Description

The Bachelor of Science in University Studies (BSUS) is designed for students who seek a unique course of study outside traditional “majors.” This program offers students the opportunity to develop an integrated, yet individualized program of study within specific guidelines. The BSUS meets students’ needs to be able to prepare for emergent career opportunities and promotes greater access and degree completion rates. Students enrolled in the BSUS degree program will build a 48 semester-hour thematic core (an individualized major). A Faculty Oversight Committee will ensure the academic integrity of each thematic core curriculum pursued under this degree program. The BSUS will include two required courses: a one semester-hour “gateway” course (within which the thematic core and a required career portfolio will be developed), and a three semester-hour “capstone” course (designed to promote knowledge integration of the thematic core content). All other program requirements will utilize existing course offerings within ECU. In addition to the above benefits, the 120 semester-hour BSUS program clearly provides opportunities for degree completion by nontraditional students, including those with some credit without degree completion (referred to as “part-way home” students) as well as active-duty military and veteran students.

Mission Relevance

Two of the four goals for the ECU strategic direction, Education for a New Century, are: (1) “We will make an East Carolina education accessible to prospective students and reach out to those who might otherwise be unable to achieve their educational potential;” and (2) “We are committed to increasing access to higher education for all students.” The BSUS proposal addresses these goals by providing options for students in choosing fields of study when current university majors are not meeting their career or educational needs. In addition, the 2013-18 UNC Strategic Directions plan calls for very specific actions for which the BSUS program can be a part of the attainment of system-wide goals. For example, Goal 1: Setting Degree Attainment Goals Responsive to State Needs speaks to increasing the percentage of state residents with a bachelor's degree or higher from 26% to 32% by 2018, and for North Carolina to be by 2025 one of the top ten most educated states in the nation. Among the strategies for accomplishing this goal are “improving graduation and retention rates and time to graduation...” including re-enrolling those students who have completed some college but have not earned a degree.

Student Demand

This degree program should prove attractive and advantageous to three particular student populations: community college transfers, military personnel, and “part-way home” students. Letters of support for this proposed degree program from area community colleges with large transfer populations, from the Special Warfare Center and School at Ft. Bragg, and from industry leaders speak to the interest of potential students from these institutions and organizations.

Societal Demand and Opportunities for Program Graduates

The program proposal discusses how the value of a college degree continues to rise, especially with regard to higher earnings and lower unemployment rates. According to the most recent data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a college education clearly results in higher earnings and lower unemployment rates. A BSUS Workforce Advisory Committee has been appointed with members representing national corporations, small businesses, governmental agencies, health care providers, utilities providers, educational agencies, and not-for-profit organizations. The members of this group will serve as a "reality check" on the employability of students in the BSUS degree program, advise on emerging fields that established majors do not address, and assist in connecting students to mentorship opportunities.

Resource Implications

The Office of Undergraduate Studies in the Provost's Office will be the organizational and administrative home for the program during its implementation stage. The operating resources for the BSUS degree program will be provided by central resources of the Division of Academic Affairs. Because the thematic core major will utilize existing ECU course offerings, no additional faculty are needed to offer this degree program. (The two new courses required to implement the BSUS program curriculum, the one semester-hour "gateway" course and a three-semester-hour "capstone" course, will be taught by the BSUS Program Director.) No new library resources, information technology services, or instructional facilities are needed.

Collaborative Opportunities

This degree program is similar to degree programs at other UNC institutions referred to as general studies, interdisciplinary studies, multidisciplinary studies, or professional studies. East Carolina University states it is certainly open to any collaborative possibilities with other UNC institutions, community colleges and/or military installations in eastern North Carolina. ECU recognizes that collaboration with other institutions increases the number and breadth of possible thematic cores that BSUS students might pursue.

Outcome of System-wide Review

Two disciplinary experts representing two UNC institutions responded to the survey questions concerning the proposed B.S. in University Studies at East Carolina University. No significant concerns were expressed regarding the proposed program.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Governors approve East Carolina University's request to establish a B.S. in University Studies degree program (CIP 24.0102) effective August 2013.