BGS Proposal, October 2013

- Discontinue the BGS with major option for majors on the Lawrence campus.
- Retain the Bachelor of General Studies in Liberal Arts and Sciences (non-major)
- Retain the BGS major option for majors on the Edwards campus.

Rationale and Impact:

A primary motivation for the introduction of the BGS degree with a major at KU was to free up credit hours from the general education requirements of the BA degree, to enable a student to follow a secondary interest as a concentration or minor. With the advent of the new Core curriculum, the credit hours for general education in the BA program have decreased significantly. (See Appendix 1 for credit hour summary.) The flexibility of the new curriculum makes it easy for all BA students to pursue a second major or minor. On the other hand, for new students the current BGS with major requirements leaves them with 40 credits of electives beyond the Core, major and minor requirements. Some students may have difficulty organizing a coherent academic program with this large number of electives. In short, the original purpose of the BGS with a major is not served by the current BGS program.

Furthermore, the main difference under the old general education requirements between the BA and the BGS with major in many majors was the foreign language requirement for the BA versus the requirement of a minor for the BGS with major. Certainly a significant factor in the choice of the BGS with major for some students was the desire to avoid foreign language. This does not serve students well; those who hope to act as professionals need to develop language skills and understanding of other cultures to function in the interconnected economy and society of the world. Although we understand that many BS and BFA degrees cannot incorporate foreign language within the 120 hour degree and that some non-traditional students would find a foreign language requirement a difficult barrier to returning to school and completing their degree, it would be ideal for students in all degree programs to attain proficiency in a foreign language. While retaining options for non-traditional students, the current proposal would encourage more CLAS undergraduates to learn a second language, which would better prepare them for the global economy and potentially increase CLAS’s international reach.

Moreover, no other university in Kansas, none of our peer institutions, and, as far as we know, no other College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers a BGS with a major. In addition, the overwhelming majority of KU’s ten official aspirational peers do not offer a BGS of any kind. Where it does exist, the term BGS elsewhere refers to an undergraduate degree that emphasizes breadth, much like the broader Bachelor of General Studies in Liberal Arts and Sciences (BGS LA&S: BGS with breadth requirement and no major) retained in this proposal.

Thus the KU BGS with major was a unique degree, which may have caused some confusion for employers and post-baccalaureate programs outside the KU area. Although some employers in the region are familiar with the degree, most employers around the country do not clearly recognize the BGS with major. Some, no doubt, care little for the title of the degree. Others may, however, confuse the degree with the nonmajor version that some universities offer.
Therefore, discontinuing the BGS with major on the Lawrence campus will help our undergraduates compete in a competitive national job market.

In addition, we do not expect that the elimination of the Lawrence campus BGS with major would result in a decrease in interest in CLAS degree programs. In all but one department offering the BGS degree, major requirements for the BGS are the same as those for the BA. Some departments may have the option of creating a BS or BFA program. Compared with the BGS with major, the new BA requires an additional 9 credit hours of Core/General Education (not including major courses counting towards the Core). The main difference is the foreign language requirement. Since many students enter KU with some foreign language experience and place out of one, two, or more semesters of language study, the credit hour increase will often be lower. Also, because the BGS with major option will be simultaneously removed from all Lawrence majors under this proposal, there would be no reason to expect a resulting shift among majors.

Nevertheless, a small but growing population has benefited from the BGS degree for different reasons in recent years. Specifically, we have an increasing number of nontraditional students. Often these students began college years ago and are returning to complete degrees, as either full- or part-time students. They may want to focus on career-oriented goals. They may want simply to complete a degree using as much of their long-ago earned credits as possible. Fewer of them are looking for a traditional liberal arts degree. The nontraditional student is well-served by two BGS options, which this proposal retains: the BGS LA&S degree and the BGS with major programs at the Edwards campus. It is worth noting here that a significant minority of Edwards campus students choose the BA over the BGS degree with major, perhaps because the options for a minor, required for the BGS with major degree, are limited at the Edwards campus. Currently, three majors are available at the Edwards campus as a BA or a BGS: Literature, Language and Writing; Psychology; and Public Administration. (For other degree programs currently offered at Edwards, see the Appendix.) There is interest in expanding degree offerings at Edwards, but that campus will presumably continue to focus on full-time workers and other nontraditional students.

In summary, with the removal of the General Education requirements that previously limited student flexibility and gave rise to the BGS with major degree option, the BGS with major degree no longer serves a clear educational purpose on the Lawrence campus. Students who desire a degree with major and some additional flexibility for minors or a second major are now well-served with the KU CORE and new BA requirements. Students on the Lawrence campus who desire a broad-based, traditional Liberal Arts degree will be better served by selecting the BGS LA&S degree.

Appendix 1. Credit hour comparison.

Note: The credit hour estimates here assume the student does not place out of any English, math or foreign language course.

Old BA – Prior to fall 2013, the general education requirements totaled 72 hours, with 3 credit hours typically coming from courses in the major. Both a major and a minor could be completed within 120 hours only with perfect planning and few, if any, electives. Completion of two majors required more than 120 hours.
New BA – As of fall 2013, the Core and general education requirements total 57 hours, with 6 credit hours typically coming from courses in the major. This leaves ample time to complete a major, minor and elective courses within 120 hours. Two full majors can be completed within 120 hours with perfect planning.

Old BGS – Prior to fall 2013, the general education requirements totaled 45 credit hours, with 3 credit hours typically coming from courses in the major. The general education, major and minor requirements typically totaled 90 hours (assuming 30 hour major and 3 hours overlap of general education and major).

New BGS – As of fall 2013, the Core curriculum totals 36 hours, with 6 credit hours typically coming from courses in the major. The Core, major and minor requirements typically total 78 hours (assuming 30 hour major and 6 hours overlap of Core and major).

Appendix 2. Bachelor’s degree programs at Edwards campus.

BBA Business Administration (School of Business)
BS Exercise Science (School of Education)
BS Information Technology (School of Engineering)
BA and BGS Literature, Language and Writing (CLAS)
BS Molecular Biosciences (CLAS)
BA and BGS Psychology (CLAS)
BA and BGS Public Administration (CLAS)
BSW Social Work (School of Social Welfare)