Proposal for Changes to the Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) Degree in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Introduction:

CUSA was asked to examine, “how the Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) degree with departmental majors supports the overall undergraduate educational mission of the College and determine the degree specific requirements needed to distinguish it as a separate degree”.

Background:

Historically, BGS degrees were developed across the US in the 1970s and 1980s as universities sought to engage with non-traditional students and provide a more flexible avenue for degree completion. There is little agreement on the specific qualities common to a BGS degree, and not all colleges and universities offer them. The inclusion of a major in KU’s BGS degree differentiates us from other institutions. In the context of KU, recent iterations of the BGS degree were justified as offering students more flexibility given the extensive demands of the General Education requirements. With the implementation of the KU Core, however, all CLAS students now have more flexibility, with even those pursuing the BA now having greater flexibility than was ever offered to BGS students. The implementation of the KU Core in particular requires that we reconsider the BGS and reshape it to best serve the population we believe most benefits from it.

With this in mind, over the last three years, CUSA has undertaken discussions of the scope, purpose, and place of the BGS degree amongst the other degrees offered by CLAS. The Bachelor of Science (BS) offers depth; the Bachelor of Arts (BA) balances breadth and depth. For the BGS to remain a distinct degree, CUSA believes that the BGS must emphasize breadth while maintaining the educational rigor that puts it on par with both the BA and BS.

In order to re-imagine the BGS within the new landscape created by the KU Core, CUSA undertook sizeable information-gathering tasks, with the support of Student Academic Services staff members, in an attempt to gather information regarding (a) the general profile of students typically pursuing the BGS degree and (b) the opinions and objectives of various stakeholders regarding the BGS degree. CUSA’s ultimate goal was to revise the BGS degree in such a way that it best serves a particular student population and maintains credibility both at KU and for outside stakeholders.

CUSA identified several characteristics of a large proportion of BGS students based on the available data:

- The BGS degree accounts for at least 34% of the total undergraduate majors (min 0%, max 67%) for approximately 75% of CLAS departments.
- The majority of students who choose the BGS enter the workforce immediately after graduation, rather than pursuing graduate or professional school.
- Students often choose the BGS late in their careers at KU; many choose it as a way to graduate more quickly.
- Although students are drawn from a range of achievement levels and preparation, the average incoming test scores and KU GPA of BGS students are lower than those of BA and BS students.
- Half of the students who choose the BGS do so because they want to avoid the 4-semester BA language requirement.
Overall, CUSA believes that the current BGS degree requires revision in order to meet the unique needs of students who typically pursue this degree at the University of Kansas. Specifically, it appears that the proper place of the BGS degree within the degrees offered by the College is one that (a) offers elements of both breadth (similar to BA degree) and depth (similar to BS degree), (b) preserves educational rigor valued by the College, and (c) specifically prepares students for the workforce with intellectual flexibility and expertise in a variety of areas.

Proposal:

CUSA proposes that the BGS is best suited to prepare students for the workforce with a variety of intellectual tools and skills. With this in mind, we recommend the following as requirements for students pursuing a BGS degree in the CLAS.

1. Fulfillment of the KU Core
2. CLAS Major
3. One of the following: Second degree (offered by CLAS or other), CLAS second major, minor (offered by CLAS or other), or two certificates (offered by CLAS or other).
4. Career preparation course(s) drawn from the following list (Minimum 3 credits):
   - Example of courses: LA&S 470, LA&S 475, LA&S 485, LA&S 490, AAAS 496, AMS 552, ABSC 675, BSC 676, ABSC 677, ABSC 679, ABSC 680, ABSC 682, ABSC 685, COMS 330, COMS 530, POLS 494, POLS 495, POLS 496, POLS 497
   - Others TBD
   - Units will need to nominate courses in their departments to meet this requirement.

Options:

- Dual-degree
- Major/major
- Major/minor
- Major/certificate/certificate

Justification

While the BGS degree is primarily focused on breadth, CUSA does not want to sacrifice the depth opportunities available in other degree options. Therefore a second and third focus area is required for most options for this degree (excluding only those pursuing a dual-degree). These additional areas of focus afford students desired depth in particular areas of study making this degree a combination of a strong liberal arts education, but also providing students with the opportunity to further explore academic disciplines. CUSA feels that the additional focus areas will help prepare students for a wide variety of career paths after graduation from KU. This proposal affords students great latitude in creating their own program of study but relies upon previously approved curricular units and creates demand for the new certificates which are part of an important campus-wide initiative. Furthermore, this proposal also supports students who desire degree options outside of the college, allowing the retention of students in the College as well as the recruitment of students from the Professional Schools.

Considerations of stakeholders:
A number of stakeholders are invested in modifications to a degree program, such as the proposed changes to the BGS. Obviously any changes provide both constraints and opportunities which should be considered before moving forward with the proposed changes. Such stakeholders involve the KU Edwards Campus, online degree programs/BGS completion programs, Student Academic Services and others. The Policy and Awards Sub-committee would suggest inviting feedback from these stakeholders before necessarily advancing the proposal from CUSA to CAC.