

ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSED NAME CHANGE FROM INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY

We propose that the *Interdisciplinary Studies* degree program at UMBC be renamed to become the *Individualized Study* degree program. The rationale for this change is to establish a name for the program that most accurately reflects the academic opportunity offered to students. Clarifying the program's focus of offering students the opportunity to develop an individualized course of study with guidance from faculty advisors, the proposed new name will facilitate student success. In particular, it will enable academic advisors to refer students whose intellectual interests are a good match for the opportunities offered by the program.

The proposed change requires no curricular changes or additional resources and makes no change in the program's target audience and market.

Background

In 1969, UMBC created the degree-granting program *Option II* as an alternative to the traditional thirteen majors offered at that time (known collectively as *Option I*) in order to “*Afford highly motivated and intellectually mature students the opportunity to construct their own academic programs*”[1] In 1979, *Option II* was renamed *Interdisciplinary Studies* to embrace an emerging body of national scholarship about integrating knowledge from different disciplines into coherent degrees (e.g. see [2]).

Between 1969 and 2017, the number and scope of undergraduate degree programs (majors) offered by UMBC increased from thirteen to sixty-six. This growth includes the creation of many explicitly interdisciplinary degree programs (Ancient Studies, Media and Communication Studies, Environmental Science *etc.*)

Rationale

All individualized degree programs involve interdisciplinarity, because they encourage students, with faculty support, to combine coursework drawn from different disciplines into a coherent whole. However, not all interdisciplinary programs involve individualized study, because many focus their students on a singular combination of disciplines or topic (e.g. Biochemistry, Asian Studies or Engineering Management). Individualized degree programs are therefore a specific sub-type of interdisciplinary degree program.

As a result of growth in the number of interdisciplinary majors offered by UMBC, it is no longer helpful for a single academic program at UMBC to retain the name “Interdisciplinary Studies.” A recent (2015) report commissioned by UMBC's Provost to describe interdisciplinary activities at UMBC concludes its introduction thus:

“[the true] wealth and diversity of interdisciplinary activities is not visible in the UMBC narrative. Instead, in many instances the word interdisciplinary is understood only to refer to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program, the individualized undergraduate major option.” (p. 4). The report goes on to recommend that “*A part of this goal [to improve interdisciplinary advising] will be to help advisors more effectively route students to the appropriate departments when they have interdisciplinary or multiple interests. At the moment, advisors, and thus incoming students, are only introduced to the Interdisciplinary Studies Program (INDS), rather than the full complement of interdisciplinary programs.*”

The proposed name change from *Interdisciplinary Studies* to *Individualized Study* will clarify the purpose for which this program was originally created, as well as its ongoing (unchanged) academic activity. This clarity will help the efficient functioning of the UMBC campus community, including successful student advising. The title “*Individualized study*” was chosen over “*Individualized Studies*” in order to emphasize the central importance of each individual student’s assembling coursework into a coherent program of study.

Environmental Scan

The proposed name change aligns with nomenclature at other institutions within USM and beyond, both within the Baltimore metro region and nationwide. Within USM, for example, UMCP offers a degree-granting *Individual Studies Program* in the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Towson University offers an *Individually Designed Thematic Option* degree program alongside a variety of other interdisciplinary studies majors (*American Studies, Animal Behavior, Ancient Studies* etc.). Beyond USM but within the Baltimore metro region, Goucher College offers an “*Individualized Interdisciplinary major*” among a cluster of interdisciplinary majors. No other programs of similar name exist locally. The pattern sketched above extends and repeats across the nation’s institutions of higher education: many (but not all) offer an individualized major. As the program at UMBC approaches APR, three of these external programs are of particular inspiration:

1. **The Individualized Studies (“Western”) Program at Miami University.** “*provides students with the opportunity to develop a personalized plan of study. This interdisciplinary program allows for integrated and intentional learning by each student and culminates with a senior research project that serves as an entry point to graduate study or a rewarding career.*”
(<http://miamioh.edu/cas/academics/programs/western/>)
2. **Rochester Institute of Technology School of Individualized Study:** “*engages in the development of flexible education pathways that support the diverse needs of 21st century learners. We educate the whole individual for personal, professional and civic success.*”
(<https://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/sois/>)
3. **Gallatin School of New York University:** “*The cornerstone of the Gallatin School is its individualized approach to education. Gallatin puts the individual student first. With the support and guidance of faculty advisers, students design unique courses of study, exploring multiple disciplines or various perspectives on specific areas of study not available in traditional departments*”
(<https://gallatin.nyu.edu/>)

The program at UMBC seeks to continue and grow its involvement with the IMP network of Individualized Major Programs (<https://impnetwork.wordpress.com/>) and its associated annual conference.

References:

- [1] Rosental, Alan. Evaluation of the Option II Program at UMBC. (1972)
- [2] e.g. Benson, Thomas C. "Five Arguments Against Interdisciplinary Studies," *Issues In Integrative Studies* (1982) vol 1, pp. 38-48