



**Western Oregon University seeks the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission approval to offer an instructional program leading to Applied Baccalaureate (AB) in Liberal Studies.**

1. Describe the purpose and relationship of the proposed program to the institution's mission and strategic plan.

Western Oregon University's mission is to create lasting opportunities for student success through transformative education and personalized support.

The proposed AB degree in Liberal Studies embodies WOU's mission, values and strategic plan in that it provides a four-year degree path for an underserved population of students who have traditionally experienced barriers to timely completion of a four-year degree due to the career-related focus on their Associate's degree. The degree develops valuable, transferable skills (e.g., Written Communication, Quantitative Literacy, Diversity, Integrative Learning and Inquiry & Analysis/Critical Thinking) that complement the career-related skills developed in an Associate of Applied Science degree program.

2. What evidence of need does the institution have for the program?

Historically, the AAS degree has been a terminal degree in that it did not feed into an established four-year degree path. As a result, AAS degree holders face barriers to achieving a four-year degree. In turn, those barriers discourage AAS degree holders from pursuing additional education in a four-year setting where they can develop the kinds of skills highly valued by employers in managerial, supervisory and professional workers. Discipline-specific AB degrees (e.g., WOU offers AB degrees in Psychology, Gerontology, Computer Science, Information Systems and Economics) have opened the door to 4-year degrees to AAS degree holders, but the specialized nature of the existing AB degrees limits their appeal to students. The proposed upside-down degree offers a flexible path for a larger swath of AAS degree holders to seek further education and a four-year degree, and allows room for students to identify specific areas of interest and concentration.

This program specifically responds to the challenges in achieving the state's 40-40-20 goal.

3. Are there similar programs in the state? If so, how does the proposed program supplement, complement, or collaborate with those programs?

Liberal Studies is also sometimes referred to as General Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies or Multi-disciplinary Studies. The following Oregon public universities offer BA and/or BS

degrees in such programs: Western Oregon University (Interdisciplinary Studies), Oregon State University (Liberal Studies), Southern Oregon University (Interdisciplinary Studies), Eastern Oregon University (Integrative Studies), Portland State University (Liberal Studies). Neither OIT nor UO offers a similar degree at the undergraduate level. Of the programs listed above, the Liberal Studies models at PSU and OSU are closest to what WOU proposes in curricular philosophy. That said, no Oregon universities offer the Applied Baccalaureate or “upside down” degree in this area.

The program complements other Liberal Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies and Integrative Studies programs in the state by (1) offering the first viable and efficient 4-year path for AAS degree holders, (2) filling the need for a flexible delivery, public university program targeting working adults in Salem and surrounding areas, and (3) complementing the existing BA/BS degree in Interdisciplinary Studies at WOU, which serves college students pursuing a more traditional path through college.

All appropriate University committees and the Statewide Provosts Council have approved the proposed program. The Western Oregon University Board of Trustees approved the program on April 18, 2018.

### **Recommendation to the Commission**

The Statewide Provosts Council recommends that the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission authorize Western Oregon University to establish an instructional program leading to an applied baccalaureate in liberal studies, effective summer of 2019.