

**UTC Department of Integrated Studies**  
**External Review – March 2024**  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

I visited the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to conduct the external review of the Bachelor of Integrated Studies program from March 4 – 6, 2024. The Bachelor of Integrated Studies degree program is now housed in the College of Arts & Sciences and is being overseen by Talia Welsh of the Department of Philosophy and Religion who serves as the current Director. Dr. Welsh also serves as the Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion. She reported that approximately 50% of her load is dedicated to her work with Integrated Studies.

The Integrated Studies major is described as a degree program that is designed to serve “traditional students, transfer students and adult students who have workplace training”. Since the program’s last review in 2019, Integrated Studies has made some changes in response to recommendations to become more user friendly and more responsive to the current demands in higher education both nationally and locally in Tennessee. Students no longer are required to submit a formal application. Instead, students now submit an interest form. The program has replaced its required culminating course with four senior experience options. There has also been a move to take on the “stewardship of more interdisciplinary programs.”

## **PART 1 – LEARNING OUTCOMES**

### **Ranking of Program in Relation to Similar Programs**

As an interdisciplinary program, the current UTC Bachelor of Integrated Studies program ranks well in comparison to other programs from the perspective of academic rigor. However, the current structure of the program with extensive requirements for coursework from two or three disciplines does continue to limit enrollment (currently 26 students, down from 38 students 5 years ago). As it is, the program resembles many interdisciplinary Honors programs at other universities. This structure is fine if the goal is to provide this type of in-depth degree program for select students with interest in connecting two or three disciplines, however, if the goal is to provide degree completion to the stated target population (“traditional students, transfer students and adult students who have workplace training”), then the program does not rank as highly and would benefit from greater curricular flexibility.

### **Clarity of Program and Learning Outcomes**

The Bachelor of Integrate Studies program has not changed its Learning Outcomes since the last review in 2019. These goals are:

1. Communicate – express a position verbally and in writing, with consideration for intent and audience.
2. Think reflectively – reflect on integrated learning and experiences in terms of theoretical and applied knowledge.

3. Solve problems – develop hypotheses, structure framework, and analyze to problem-solve.
4. Collaborate – collaborate through measurable experiential learning opportunities.
5. Integrate Learning – connect learning across two or three disciplines, both theoretically and applied.

These goals are appropriate for an Integrated Studies program, but delivering and assessing these goals is somewhat challenging due to the nature of the program. Since courses are taken in a variety of disciplines, there are few common experiences that can be used for assessment. The students who take the INTS 4900, Integrated Studies Senior Portfolio course, do produce an artifact that can be used for assessment. However, this does not provide an opportunity to assess growth throughout the program since there are no comparative artifacts to be used from earlier in a student's degree program. In addition, now that students have a variety of choices for their senior experience, not all students are producing this culminating artifact.

It is also unclear if students are aware of these Learning Outcomes throughout their program since they have little opportunity to have shared experiences with other students connected to their declared degree program. The first three outcomes (Communicate, Think reflectively, and Solve problems) are most likely all developed regardless of the variety of disciplines selected by the Integrated Studies student. However, the fourth and fifth goals (Collaborate, and Integrate Learning) would be well-served by a degree-specific experience that teaches and assesses these outcomes.

To support its program assessment, it might be useful to create a more developed mission and vision statement that is shared with all students upon declaration of the major. This statement should also include provision of the Learning Outcomes for the program to all students.

One recent addition to the Integrated Studies degree program is the option of an internship for the culminating experience. This is a very positive development as it provides students opportunities for practical experience in a career of interest.

## **PART 2 – CURRICULUM**

The curriculum for each student pursuing a degree in Integrated Studies is different except for the requirement for a Senior Experience. This makes it difficult to assess many of the questions for this section from the Guidelines for the Narrative Report. With the expansion to four options for the Senior Experience, there is no longer a single shared experience for students in the Integrated Studies program.

Students do have support from the Program Coordinator, and from academic advising to insure they are making timely progress toward graduation. The Program Coordinator helps students find course substitutions when specific courses are not available to Integrated Studies students.

The addition of at least one shared course experience could help align the curriculum with the stated program Learning Outcomes. This would help students become more aware of these outcomes and be able to track their own development throughout their course work. It could also provide an opportunity to have students produce an artifact that could be used for comparative/cumulative assessment at the end of their program. Such a course would also provide the opportunity to teach students about integrated thinking and problem-solving and to work on their collaboration skills.

### **PART 3 – STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

As currently designed, it is possible for a student to complete the Integrated Studies degree without ever interacting with other students in the program. This is a potential area for development to help students create a stronger sense of community in Integrated Studies. There are some online opportunities for students to interact and this should continue. However, it might be beneficial to some students in the program to offer a few opportunities throughout the academic year to interact with each other as well as with the Director and Program Coordinator.

Though the program itself does not offer extracurricular activities, UTC has many opportunities for students to get involved with student clubs, attend events, and to find communities where they can develop a sense of belonging and to be exposed to diverse perspectives.

### **PART 4 – FACULTY**

Dr. Talia Welsh, Director, and Dr. Lee Sumer Patterson, Program Coordinator, are the two faculty directly connected to the Integrated Studies program. Both are exceptionally well-trained and experienced individuals with excellent qualifications to both lead and teach in the Integrated Studies program. They both hold terminal degrees in appropriate disciplines to teach in Integrated Studies. Both are evaluated regularly through UTC's evaluation systems.

At its current size (26 declared majors), the current faculty size is adequate for the program. However, if the goal is to expand and grow, then additional faculty and staff resources are necessary. This is already evident as Integrated Studies is becoming the home for campus-wide interdisciplinary programs. One example is the Pre-Health minor which is overseen by Theresa Blackman. This program will officially begin in the Fall of 2024 with a potential student population of 1,700 students, all of whom have already expressed an interest in the minor. Currently, Theresa already has approximately 800 advising appointments a year. She will need additional support moving forward as the Pre-Health minor opens up in the Fall.

### **PART 5 – LEARNING RESOURCES**

The Integrated Studies program have very limited resources. Dr. Welsh works out of her office in the Department of Philosophy and Religion, and Dr. Patterson has an office on the same floor in Lupton Hall as Dr. Welch. However, there is currently no Integrated Studies Program Office. The Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Pam Riggs-Gelasco, indicated she is exploring spaces in Lupton Hall for a program office. This is an important need for the Integrated Studies program to increase its visibility and availability to current and future students.

Integrated Studies students have access to all the same facilities as students in other majors at UTC. The library is excellent with extensive holdings in any field individual students are exploring. The staff is student-friendly and available to support Integrated Studies whenever requested.

### **PART 6 – SUPPORT**

Even at its current size, the Integrated Studies program is under-resourced. The program does have a minimal budget for supplies, but this budget has not increased in many years. One priority is resources for the design and production of program recruitment materials. The program recruits at orientations and at major fairs, and they would be better served with attractive, up-to-date

recruitment materials. Additional recruitment is done by the Program Coordinator at the local community college where these materials would be very helpful. Program brochures should be available to all academic advisors at UTC (a presentation is made to the advisors' council annually). These materials will also be important as the program is now reaching out to stop-out students (approximately 400 to 500 students per semester).

Greater support for recruitment and program development is aligned with the expressed desire to offer the Integrated Studies major to a much larger number of stop-out and returning students. The success of such a campaign would also create a greater need for more staff and faculty to support the program. It was stated that the mission of UTC is to be responsive to the educational needs of the local community, with a particular emphasis on working professionals in need of degree completion. This is a rich source of opportunity for UTC and for the Integrated Studies program.

## **PART 7 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Like my review of the Integrated Studies program five years ago, my impressions and recommendations fall into two categories. The first category includes my observations and recommendations for the program in its current iteration. The second category of recommendations are based on the expressed desire for the program to grow and to be responsive to the academic needs of the local community.

### **Current Program Impressions**

By incorporating a minor-minor model for its curriculum, the Integrated Studies program has already taken important steps to become more user friendly than it was in the past. The established sequences of courses in minors are readily adaptable to Integrated Studies majors reducing the need for course substitutions and requests for waivers from other Departments. This is a positive development.

The program is currently run by two deeply caring, well-qualified individuals in Dr. Welsh and Dr. Patterson. Both are very open to making curricular changes based on student needs (as already indicated in the expansion of the senior experience to four options from one option).

It is somewhat surprising that the program continues to have low enrollments (26 at present). Though the program is more flexible than it was five years ago, it may still be perceived as too demanding for someone seeking a route to degree completion. The program does actively recruit at various events on campus and does make sure that academic advisors are aware of the program, so it is already making efforts to market Integrated Studies. I suggest creating more attractive promotional materials for Integrated Studies that can be distributed both while recruiting new students to UTC and during major fairs on campus for current students.

I am also concerned about the limited opportunities to build community among the Integrated Studies students. Though they have an online platform where they can connect and interact, some more formal "meet and greet" sessions (both online and in person) might help build stronger community among the majors. This would also be a way to help students be more aware of the program's Learning Outcomes and to discuss their individual progress toward achieving these goals.

### **Current Program Recommendations**

1. Develop a means to introduce Integrated Studies majors to the Learning Outcomes of the program upon declaration of the major. This can be done on the existing online platform

or through other online means such as announcements, a newsletter, emails, student testimonials, or other creative means. A majors meeting could be hosted in person each semester so that students can be reminded of the program goals as well as have an opportunity to get to know each other. Such online and face-to-face experiences will help students gauge their growth in each of the five outcome areas and will also help the program develop assessment strategies. It will also foster a greater sense of community among the Integrated Studies majors.

2. The creation of an Introduction to Integrated Studies course is recommended to help students understand integrated thinking, develop an awareness of the Program Learning Outcomes, and to help students chart the rest of their course of study. This would require additional faculty resources both for course development and course delivery. This course could provide the one shared curricular experience for all students in the Integrated Studies program.
3. The current program has limited opportunities to collect artifacts for program assessment. In the earlier iteration of the program, all students created a Senior Portfolio that gave assessors some materials to use to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Very small samples have been used in recent years to assess the Integrated Studies program. To ensure the continued success of the degree program, the creation of at least one shared assignment for all students that addresses the Program Learning Outcomes should be created. This could be an assignment that is required of students in all four of the Senior Experience options. It is also recommended that these artifacts are assessed by a team made up of both Integrated Studies faculty and faculty from other disciplines to help reduce bias.
4. The creation of new, updated, attractive marketing materials for the Integrated Studies program is recommended. These materials should have both virtual and paper versions that can be distributed online and at face-to-face recruitment events. This will require additional resources.
5. Continue to increase online options for students as well as partial term courses. This will help the returning students who are also working full time. Both synchronous and asynchronous delivery options would allow for differing learning styles and individual scheduling realities.
6. For high demand courses for Integrated Studies students from other majors, work with other programs to hold back a small number of seats for Integrated Studies students. This will allow for fewer course substitutions and better progress toward degree completion.
7. Since many students who might find the Integrated Studies degree option attractive have financial challenges, additional scholarship money would be helpful to recruit and retain students. A small scholarship fund has already been created. Program growth may be helped by having additional scholarships available.

### **Future Program Impressions**

The Integrated Studies program is at a moment of great promise. The willingness to make necessary curricular changes to be more available to people looking for degree completion, the move to centralize all integrated studies options at UTC, and strong University and program leadership all

have opened a door for Integrated Studies to grow rapidly. But this growth will require thoughtful planning and additional resources. UTC administration indicated a desire to allow Integrated Studies to be an important bridge to the local community and to be a place where stop-out students and working professionals can come to complete their undergraduate degree.

### **Future Program Recommendations**

1. Fully implement the consolidation of all integrated programs under the umbrella of Integrated Studies. This would require an office, staff, and support from all related programs. This would be home for the new Pre-Health minor (positioned for explosive growth in the Fall of 2024), all integrated minors, and any other integrated, cross-disciplinary, or multi-disciplinary programs.
2. To facilitate this vision, develop a five-year strategic plan with a clear vision for the magnitude of growth anticipated. This will allow for appropriate requests for additional resources that include faculty and staff, space, and materials. The creation of this plan should include as many impacted individuals as possible to guarantee an agreed upon vision for the future of Integrated Studies at UTC. This plan should encompass all elements envisioned for the future (programs included, target audiences, marketing campaign, resource needs, etc...).
3. Identify and court community partners. One option would be to work with larger local employers to help recruit students into the Integrated Studies degree program while also encouraging them to provide tuition support for their employees to complete their undergraduate degrees.
4. With the change in vision to include becoming a home for all campus integrated undergraduate programs, the Director should be moved from part-time to full-time. This would allow for the full focus of the individual in the position and would help facilitate the extensive changes.
5. Ensure that a fully online degree option is available to Integrated Studies majors. This will help recruit and retain working professionals. Part-term courses should also be available, when possible, to Integrated Studies majors.
6. Create robust internship opportunities with local employers that will lead directly to full time employment for students who perform well as interns. Whenever possible, these internships should be paid.
7. Consider hiring a full-time recruiter/community liaison to work with local businesses to recruit students into the Integrated Studies program. This individual could also work with companies to create scholarships, internships, and flexible work schedules to assist their employees in degree completion.
8. Along with the full-time recruiter/community liaison, consider hiring Navigators/Mentors for returning students. This can be framed as a “concierge service” for these students. These positions might be funded by local businesses who have a large number of employees returning to pursue degree completion.
9. If a large population of students exists at any particular business, consider offering courses on site at the business location.
10. Consider creating a “debt forgiveness” program for stop-out students for whom money is a barrier to re-enrolling.

11. Consult with Continuing Education about the possibility of creating a credit articulation agreement with their certification programs.

These recommendations are all in line with the program's statement that it is designed to serve "traditional students, transfer students and adult students who have workplace training". This could be a turning point for the Integrated Studies program at UTC if the University administration is willing to invest the resources necessary to facilitate this growth. UTC has the vision and talent to create a cutting-edge Integrated Studies/General Studies degree completion program that is responsive to the changing realities in higher education and to the needs of individuals in their community.