Approved by the Board of Trustees

May 22, 2025

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Board Meeting

May 22, 2025

ESTABLISH THE BACHELOR OF LIBERAL STUDIES IN LIBERAL STUDIES, COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES, URBANA

**Action:** Establish the Bachelor of Liberal Studies in Liberal Studies, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

**Funding:** No new funding required

The chancellor, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and vice president, University of Illinois System, with the advice of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Senate recommends approval of a proposal from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences to establish the Bachelor of Liberal Studies in Liberal Studies (BLS in Liberal Studies).

The proposed BLS aims to serve the growing population of adult learners who have completed some college but do not hold a bachelor’s degree. For the more than 40 million adults in the United States in this situation, the BLS provides an accessible, flexible, and supportive pathway to a bachelor’s degree. Adult students, often juggling work and family responsibilities, require flexible learning options that traditional on-campus programs cannot provide. By offering the BLS online, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign can cater to this growing demand for lifelong learning and continuous reskilling, which is essential in today’s knowledge economy.

As an online bachelor’s degree completion program, the BLS aligns with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s mission and vision as a land-grant institution. By offering the proposed program, which is aligned with labor market needs, the university can contribute to the economic development of the state and beyond, fulfilling its land-grant mission of driving societal progress through education and innovation. It supports the institutional commitment to innovation in teaching and learning, ensuring education is accessible to a broad audience that includes non-traditional students. By integrating online programs into the core mission of its academic colleges and departments, the university can expand its reach and impact while maintaining its reputation as a preeminent public research university. Expanding in the online education market allows the university to tap into a new and largely untapped cohort of learners, increasing enrollment and revenue streams.

The BLS will provide a bachelor’s degree completion option for those seeking to transition to new industries or roles, as its adaptable, skills-based curriculum allows them to acquire new skills and knowledge relevant to desired fields. In addition, the program will appeal to working professionals seeking career advancement attainable without interrupting their work commitments, enhancing leadership, data analysis, and critical thinking skills, thereby allowing graduates to secure higher-level positions in their current field. Also, the BLS presents an opportunity for those who faced obstacles in completing a traditional degree, allowing them to finish their education in a supportive, accessible format. For these students, completing their degree represents a significant personal achievement and a second chance at success.

Geared to maximum flexibility, the BLS will be comprised of asynchronous online courses and will allow for part-time enrollment. Designed around the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career competencies, courses that comprise the BLS were chosen with a cross-disciplinary approach, empowering students to develop skills that are versatile and applicable across various sectors, including government, education, and non-profit organizations. This structure offers students a robust foundation while allowing them to tailor their learning experience through three concentrations: Health and Society, Global Perspectives, and Management Studies. The establishment of these concentrations is included as companion report items. Courses in the BLS will be open to other University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign students, and this co-enrollment is expected to provide advantages including exposure to diverse perspectives, networking, and enhanced engagement. This model also addresses key scheduling and resource efficiency concerns, ultimately supporting the financial sustainability of the program, ensuring the institution can meet the needs of adult students while efficiently utilizing resources and maintaining a robust array of courses. While students from the BLS will co-enroll with other university students, it is notable that care was taken to ensure the curriculum of the BLS did not duplicate existing majors offered to undergraduate students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As a unique, interdisciplinary major, the BLS complements rather than competes with the institution’s other offerings.

Funding from the provost’s Investment for Growth (IFG) program will support the establishment of the BLS. In addition to the program director, who is already in place, the BLS in Liberal Studies program budget allows for the hiring of two academic advisors, one program coordinator, and one assistant director who will work specifically with BLS students. IFG funds will also provide stipends for instructors and course development specialists to develop new or to modify existing courses in the BLS program. After the first five years, revenue generated through student tuition is projected to cover additional expenses, further course development and production, and operational costs.

The Board action recommended in this item complies in all material respects with applicable State and federal laws, University of Illinois *Statutes*, *The General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure*, and Board of Trustees policies and directives.

The executive vice president and vice president for academic affairs concurs with this recommendation. The University Senates Conference has indicated that no further senate jurisdiction is involved.

The president of the University of Illinois System recommends approval. This action is subject to further review by the Illinois Board of Higher Education.