

Contact: Rachel Boon

REQUEST FOR NEW PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA: MASTER OF ARTS IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

Action Requested: Consider approval of the request by the University of Northern Iowa for a Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in the Graduate College.

The Council of Provosts and Board office support approval of this program.

Description of proposed program. The Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (MAIS) is a standalone 30-hour master's degree program that allows students to choose between two to three concentration or subject areas, enabling them to meet their personal, academic and professional goals by drawing from interdisciplinary fields to create a unique, individualized course of study that can be tailored to their specific needs. The minimum number of units per concentration or subject area is six hours. This program is offered primarily as a non-thesis degree. This program is positioned to serve as a stand-alone degree, or as a completer degree for non-traditional students who have some graduate credit and are looking for an opportunity to finish a graduate credential. Courses that will apply to this program will be offered in face-to-face, hybrid and online modalities. Depending on the areas of concentration selected by the student, internships, practicums, clinical immersion, community engagement and other activities can be included in the plan of study.

Academic objectives.

1. To provide graduate students an opportunity to develop an individualized plan of studies that integrates knowledge from diverse disciplines to meet academic and professional goals.
2. To develop the competency needed for a variety of professional opportunities or to continue furthering graduate studies.

Need for program. Through the UNI strategic planning processes and independent ad hoc committee recommendations, it is clear that there is a strong need for more interdisciplinary programs and alternative credentialing options to address the changing expectations of students and to be nimble and responsive to the varying demands of the workforce. A degree like the MAIS affords students the ability to create a unique, individualized course of study that can be tailored to their specific career and personal goals.

Relationship to existing programs at the institution. UNI offers graduate programs in five areas: 1. Arts and Humanities; 2. Behavioral and Health Sciences; 3. Business, Government, and Non-Profit; 4. Education; and 5. Science and Technology. The MAIS draws from these concentration areas to create an individualized program designed to meet students' professional needs and aspirations. The concentration areas provide all graduate programs and departments offering graduate coursework with an opportunity to participate in this degree and collaborate in an interdisciplinary manner to create rich and impactful learning opportunities for student success. The new MAIS degree does not duplicate existing programs at UNI.

Relationship to existing programs at other colleges and universities. The following two similar interdisciplinary master's programs are in place:

- University of Iowa: Interdisciplinary Studies Program (Master's and Doctorate)
- Iowa State University: Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Program (MS, MA)

Resources to establish a high-quality program. UNI currently has the personnel, facilities and equipment to maintain the program. The individual curricular pieces are already in place and offered by a variety of departments. Since the curriculum is crafted from existing coursework, no new faculty or facilities are needed. The program will be housed in the Graduate College.

Student demand. The number of graduate degrees conferred by degree-granting postsecondary institutions have been increasing in a solid manner. The total number of master’s degrees increased by 43% between 2003-04 and 2016-17 and it is projected to increase by another 4% by 2028-29 (NCES, 2022). Given these trends, UNI is well-positioned to offer an interdisciplinary program that is aimed at traditional and post-traditional students who desire to complete a master’s degree that meets their professional needs and aspirations; offers flexibility and a variety of curricular options; and is affordable.

Workforce need/demand. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the total employment in the U.S. economy is projected to grow by 15.6 million during the 2012–2022 decade to reach 161 million; this represents a 10.8-percent employment increase. Some of the fastest projected growth will occur in the healthcare, healthcare support, construction, and personal care fields. Together, these four occupational groups are expected to account for about one-third—more than 5.3 million—of all new jobs during this period.” Accordingly, employment projection by educational requirements at the master’s level is expected to increase by 18.4 % by the end of 2022. In addition, Iowa employers reported the need to have employees with strong written communication, critical thinking, and communication skills (Iowa Workforce Needs Assessment). Therefore, a master’s degree in interdisciplinary studies has the potential to prepare an educated workforce with the skills needed to be successful as well as providing advancement opportunities to those that hold the degree.

Funding and Cost. The resources are already in place through the Office of Distance Education, The Graduate College staff and the existing online course offerings.

Projected student enrollment.

	Y1	Y 2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Graduate	5	10	15	20	25

Accreditation. No additional accreditation is needed for this program.

Evaluation plan. This program will be part of UNI’s standard program evaluation processes that are required for all academic programs.

Date of implementation. Fall 2023.

Letters of Support



October 14, 2022

To the Board of Regents:

The Council of Provosts discussed the University of Northern Iowa proposal for a Master of Arts in Individualized Studies and reviewed associated documentation. This program is would provide a flexible, interdisciplinary option that is unique and suggests good value for this program. The plan indicates due diligence and the Council of Provosts appreciates the open communication and collaboration with the Deans of Graduate College at ISU and SUI. Based on the evidence and documentation, this program is likely to benefit master's level students in the state of Iowa.

The Council of Provosts is supportive of the program and wishes the University of Northern Iowa the best in its implementation.

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