Contact: Rachel Boon

REQUEST FOR NEW PROGRAM IN BACHELOR OF APPLIED PROFESSIONAL STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

Committee Action Requested: Recommend to the Board approval of the request for a new program in Bachelor of Applied Professional Studies in the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education at the University of Northern Iowa.

The Council of Provosts and Board office staff reviewed the proposal and recommend approval.

Description of Proposed Program: The newly proposed Bachelor of Applied Professional Studies (BAPS) degree is designed to enhance career readiness by enabling students to pursue coursework in skill areas directly related to their current or intended profession. This streamlined program requires a minimum of 90 units, instead of the traditional 120, making it more accessible and affordable for students, reducing time to completion, and allowing students to enter the workforce sooner.

The purpose of this degree is twofold: 1) it offers students the opportunity to gain real-world skills for career development and focus on market-demand areas of study that match their interests, and 2) it serves as a flexible degree-completion program for adult learners to transfer in completed college credits from another accredited institution to obtain their bachelor's degree and/or receive credit for prior learning, work or military experience, enhancing marketability.

This proposed program features a 12-unit core curriculum that provides in-depth focus on career development, AI literacy, and technology, equipping students with essential, strategic job-seeking skills. In addition to the core, students can select courses from a range of disciplines that further support their professional growth. The program also offers two specialized areas of study: 1) organizational and workplace effectiveness or 2) educational studies, which allow students to tailor their education to their specific career interests. This degree prepares students for career advancement, workforce mobility and leadership roles in education-related and workforce-facing professions.

Academic Objectives: Graduates of the Bachelor of Applied Professional Studies will be able to:

- Analyze and address workplace challenges using critical thinking and problem-solving strategies
- Communicate effectively in professional settings through clear, concise, and audience-appropriate written, verbal and digital formats
- Apply interdisciplinary knowledge and professional skills to real-world workplace situations
- Develop and articulate career goals aligned with personal strengths and labor market needs

Employers increasingly seek graduates with strong communication, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as career readiness competencies. The academic objectives above are designed to align with these job market demands.

Need for Program: Many working adults and community college graduates, especially those with AAS degrees, seek degree-completion pathways that recognize prior learning and lead to clear career advancement. Moreover, employers increasingly prioritize skills and micro-

credentials alongside a degree, and value programs with embedded work-based learning and job-ready competencies (NCES, 2026).

UNI recognizes the benefits of offering a reduced credit degree program that can be completed in three years, especially for working professionals wanting to reskill or upskill; however, the impetus for the creation of such a program was guided by House File 440 or the "College Affordability Act" that was signed into law on May 6, 2025 requiring at least one baccalaureate degree program that can be competed in three years at all of Iowa's three state universities.

Because UNI currently does not offer a degree that focuses entirely on career readiness for adult learners, this degree will bridge the widening "skills gap" and provides accelerated pathways for adult learners (adults over 25) who make up 30-33% of the U.S. higher education enrollment (NCES, 2026). This degree also targets the 43 million in the U.S. who have "some college, no credential." Many of whom are employed in roles connected to education, youth services, or workforce development and require a bachelor's degree. (National Student Clearinghouse, 2025).

Resources Needed for Program: Because this program will draw on existing coursework, it will not require additional faculty to run effectively. Moreover, this program will be housed and administered under the College of Graduate, Research and Online Education, which has the resources to support this program; therefore, no additional facilities or equipment are required, as the platforms and structures already exist at UNI.

Funding Sources: The financial resources for this program will be covered by the Division of Online Education and Individual Studies. Revenues generated by the program will be used to support its operations.

Workforce Demand: Workforce demand for graduates of reduced-credit bachelor's degrees is driven by a structural shift in the U.S. labor market toward skills-based hiring and an urgent need to fill high-demand jobs more quickly than in the past (Economy Insights, 2026). Roughly 18 states have officially removed bachelor's degree requirements for many state government roles, which further supports the shift to skills-based competencies that a reduced-credit program can more readily provide (America First Policy Institute, 2024).

At the state level, Iowa is experiencing a "degree-job mismatch" where the state produces talented graduates in fields that do not always align with specific labor needs. Addressing this gap through a targeted reduced-credit program could help alleviate some of the economic strain (Corridor Business Journal, 2026). Demand for non-licensure educational studies roles is increasing in Iowa. Positions such as paraeducators, child development specialists, community education and services coordinators, and alternative teacher roles are needed statewide (Iowa Department of Education, 2026). For example, individuals with a background in educational studies can work as an authorized Career and Technical Education instructor with a traditional teaching license within the state.

Additionally, demand for non-licensure educational roles is increasing nationwide. This growth largely responds to persistent, certified teacher shortages and changing workforce structures within public education (Research.com, 2026).

Nationwide, there is a major increase in skills-based hiring, which means that a student with a degree focused on career readiness aligns perfectly with this shifting landscape. A degree like the BAPS positions students well to enter the workforce, especially as employers increasingly value demonstrable skills over traditional credentials (Tufts University, 2025)

Student Demand: The growing national demand for reduced-credit programs is largely fueled by “consumer impatience” with the time and cost required to complete traditional degrees. This trend is becoming increasingly evident at UNI, as reflected in the feedback and inquiries we receive through our Request for Information forms and in students' desire to take more hours per semester to complete their degrees faster and with less debt. By serving the growing number of adult learners entering higher education, we will serve a wider demographic audience and meet the needs of a new and emerging student population.

Enrollment Projections:

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**
Majors	15	30	50	65	75
Non-majors	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Relationship to Existing Programs at Other Universities: Upper Iowa University has created a reduced credit degree, Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (total credits required: 90 units). UIU is one of Iowa’s adult-serving institutions.

Accreditation: The University of Northern Iowa will seek approval from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) through its substantive change process for reduced-credit bachelor’s degree programs after the Iowa Board of Regents approval process is concluded.

Date of Implementation: August 2027.