



# UNION INSTITUTE & UNIVERSITY

## **Bachelor of Arts Student Handbook**

**Effective July 1, 2012—June 30, 2013**

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## Purpose of the B.A. Student Handbook

This handbook is designed to serve the students and faculty of all options of the B.A. program of Union Institute & University. Its contents are revised as needed, with notification made of any revision. This handbook, in conjunction with the University Catalog, articulates the official academic policy of the program.

The policies and procedures described in this Handbook apply to students matriculated in the Union Institute & University's Bachelor of Arts program July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013 and are continually updated. Union Institute & University reserves the right to amend, to modify, or to revise the policies and procedures stated herein as considered necessary and appropriate and as approved by the Board of Trustees.

This academic structure rests on a foundation of regulation, described in this handbook. All contents of this handbook have regulatory authority and will be strictly observed. All students and faculty members are responsible for knowing the contents of this handbook and following it.

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Union Institute & University is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Union Institute & University is also authorized as a degree-granting institution by the Ohio Board of Regents, the Florida Commission for Independent Education, and the Vermont Board of Education.

Union Institute & University does not discriminate in admissions, employment, or policy on the basis of age, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, or physical impairment. Union Institute & University policies and practices conform with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975.

Union Institute & University conforms to the provisions of student rights under the Family and Student Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 as amended. Files are maintained and released under the provisions of the act.

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Dear B.A. Student,

Welcome to Union Institute & University!

Union's unique educational model enables students to take control of their education, to shape it to fit their personal interests and plans. Here you can explore your interests whether they lie in the Arts, the Social Sciences, the Humanities, the Natural Sciences, or in some mixture of these.

The Bachelor of Arts program takes inspiration from John Dewey, who famously wrote, "Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself." Union's students typically reflect this idea. You bring rich life experiences to the university and you will weave these into your studies. You are about to embark on an exciting journey, and this handbook is one of the tools that will help you along the way.

The B.A. Program Handbook exists as a supplement to the University Catalog, which is available at <http://www.myunion.edu/academics/university-catalog.html>. In the larger University Catalog you'll find information about policies that affect all UI&U learners, such as financial aid resources and services, academic policies and services, career counseling services, etc. The University Catalog contains a section devoted to the B.A. program that goes into more specific detail. Having the University Catalog and the B.A. Handbook available online means that you will be able to access relevant information wherever you find yourself working.

Take the time to browse through both the B.A. Handbook and the relevant University Catalog sections to become acquainted with their contents. You are always welcome to call the program office with questions, but it is often helpful to check the Handbook and/or Catalog first and to use them later as handy references and reminders.

Once again, I'd like to welcome everyone to this academic year and the B.A. program. Enjoy your studies!

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Lerner, Ph.D.  
Dean, Vermont Academic Centers

## UNIVERSITY MISSION AND VALUES

### **Mission**

Union Institute & University empowers adults to acquire, apply, and create knowledge through interdisciplinary, flexible, and collaborative programs focusing on social relevance, personal enrichment, and professional advancement.

### **Vision**

Union Institute & University aspires to educate generations of highly motivated adults who seek academic programs that engage, enlighten, and empower them in their pursuit of a lifetime of learning and service.

### **Values**

*Social Relevance:* Union Institute & University requires that the programs of its students reflect their awareness of the social implications of their studies and of their obligation to share knowledge with integrity in the communities in which they serve.

*Creative and Critical Thinking:* Union Institute & University supports different modes of disciplinary and interdisciplinary inquiry to explore ideas and issues from multiple perspectives.

*Interdisciplinarity:* Union Institute & University promotes interdisciplinary scholarship as a means to advance the frontiers of knowledge and develop new modes of inquiry.

*Scholar-Practitioner Model:* Union Institute & University advocates an educational process whereby scholarship and theory are connected and applied to real-world action and practice.

### **Principles**

*Academic Quality:* Union Institute & University is committed to academic excellence and insures institutional quality through continuous assessment and review of programs, processes, policies, and outcomes.

*Diversity:* Union Institute & University reflects and celebrates diversity in all its forms.

*Service:* Union Institute & University engages in service to others with a commitment to transparency, integrity, and respect.

*Community:* Union Institute & University links engaged students with dedicated faculty mentors and the larger society in which they live and work, thus building a mutually beneficial, expansive, and collaborative community that lives beyond the classroom.

## B.A. PROGRAM MISSION AND VALUES

The mission of the B.A. in Liberal Studies is to develop students' minds, skills and recognition of themselves as constructors of meaning and knowledge. The program seeks to provide students with valuable habits of mind, including thoughtful reading, critical and creative thinking, and an ability to express themselves in writing with clarity, power and grace. The foundation of the B.A. in Liberal Studies is the progressive philosophy of John Dewey, who writes, in *Democracy and Education*:

Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not a preparation for life but is life itself. The only true education comes from the stimulation of [our] powers by the demands of the social situations in which [we] find ourselves.

The Bachelor of Arts program shares the University's vision of providing a course of study that engages, enlightens, and empowers highly motivated adult students in their pursuit of a lifetime of learning and service. Besides providing students with core knowledge distinguishing a well-educated person in the twenty-first century, it prepares students for careers that require good writing skills, critical and creative thinking, the ability to read and understand complex written material, and a strong ethical sensibility. In addition, students are prepared for graduate study in many fields including psychology, education, the arts, law, and the academic fields represented in the concentrations. Approved by the State of Vermont for teacher licensure, the B.A. program also prepares students for careers in public and private education.

The B.A. program embodies the University's four values of social relevance, creative and critical thinking, interdisciplinarity, and the scholar-practitioner model of learning. It practices the four UI&U principles of academic quality, diversity, service, and community.

## **B.A. PROGRAM HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**

### **HISTORY**

Originally known as the Adult Degree Program (ADP), the Bachelor of Arts program was founded at Goddard College, Plainfield, Vermont, in 1963, from the original ideas of Evelyn Bates, who was the executive assistant to Goddard College's founding president, Royce Pitkin. The ADP was acquired by Norwich University in 1981 and relocated to Norwich's Vermont College campus in Montpelier, Vermont, where it thrived for twenty years.

In October 2001, ADP was acquired by Cincinnati-based Union Institute, which was then officially re-named as Union Institute & University (UI&U). Subsequently, ADP became known as the Vermont College Undergraduate program (VCU). After the sale of the Vermont College campus to the Vermont College of Fine Arts in 2008, VCU became known simply as the B.A. program of Union Institute & University, with administrative offices in the Vermont Academic Center in Montpelier and academic residencies held in Montpelier, in Brattleboro, VT, or solely online.

### **PHILOSOPHY**

The Bachelor of Arts program of UI&U provides student-centered education for adults, inviting them to study questions of deep personal interest and to draw on their life experiences and knowledge as a context for their learning. Other principles that guide our educational practices include:

- Good education rests on students' intrinsic motivation to learn.
- Intellectual growth is ongoing throughout life.
- College-level learning goes beyond knowledge of facts and theories to embrace lifelong practices of reflecting, thinking and learning.
- Education provides a foundation for thoughtful citizenship and action in the world.

Our philosophy is grounded in models of progressive education from the work of theorists such as John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Maxine Greene, Jane Roland Martin, and Lev Vygotsky. We emphasize an intellectual relationship between professors and students that seeks enlightenment and finds joy in learning. Unlike what Paulo Freire calls "the banking model" where teachers make "deposits" in students' minds, our way of learning and knowing emphasizes collaboration between professor and student, and among all students, with the aim of absorbing and reflecting on existing scholarship and knowledge, followed by creating new knowledge.

## **RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION**

### **FACULTY AND STAFF**

Students' educational needs are served by faculty members, called Professors, who direct independent studies and seminars, provide academic counseling, and conduct academic reviews. A student's professor changes each term. In contrast, Program Advisors are assigned to students at entry and remain with a student throughout his or her time in the program. Program Advisors provide continuity, conduct new student welcomes and counseling, check in with students about their status on a regular basis, and, as needed, serve as a liaison between professor and student, as well as provide other individual services.

Full-time faculty members have a student load of 14 students per trimester, serve on program and university committees, and maintain scholarly activities. They are known as "core" faculty. Part-time affiliated faculty members have a student load of 8 students. They are hired on a trimester-by-trimester basis, depending on enrollment in the B.A. program. Names and biographies of all faculty members can be found on the website.

The three program advisors share responsibility for students in the online option, and each takes primary responsibility for one residential option. Their phone extension #s follow:

- Gail MacDonald x8815 (many online students + PA contact for teacher licensure)
- Sharon Sprague x8816 (primary contact for Brattleboro weekend + some online students)
- Melissa Sprague x8570 (primary contact for Montpelier weekend + some online students)

The Associate Dean is also available for counseling students and answering questions and concerns: x8813. The toll-free telephone number is (800) 336-6794

For issues concerning financial aid and questions about billing from the business office, students should consult the Learning Services Coordinator, Bob Fisher x8722

### **RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS**

Both B.A. program options require students to attend and participate actively in all residencies.

- For Weekend option, students are required to be present at the first residency in order begin a study. There are no permitted absences. If students must miss a residency for family emergencies or illness, program advisors and professors must be notified in advance. Weekend students are not allowed to miss more than the equivalent of a full weekend residency without penalty.
- For Online option, students must attend and actively participate in the initial residency, the final three-day residency at the end of the term, and whatever group meetings are required by their professor.
- For seminars, students are required to attend any face-to-face sessions (hybrid seminars only) and to participate actively and substantively as required by faculty, a minimum of two substantive postings in discussions per week.

## **ORIENTATION FOR NEW STUDENTS IN THE PROGRAM**

New students hear from program staff shortly after their acceptance and are set up with a Union Institute & University email account, access to CampusWeb, and ability to use the Union Library. They receive virtual orientations to the B.A. process and information about student services such as the library, technology requirements, and Americans for Disability procedures, as well as contact information for financial aid and business offices. This information is supplemented by telephone contact to provide each new student with individual counseling about transfer credit and to answer questions that the new student might have.

In addition to these early contacts, new students in the weekend option receive a half-day face-to-face group orientation immediately prior to the first residency. New students in the Online option are provided with a tutorial shortly before the residency which teaches them how to use the web-based Campus Web system used for residency and learning activities. Students who begin their studies with one or two seminars will also be provided with the Campus Web tutorial, as all seminars use that platform.

To help orient new students to independent study, the first independent study taken in the B.A. Program is more structured than subsequent independent studies will be. Approximately one-quarter of the study's reading will be required articles or texts that will be discussed by all new students. In addition, professors will provide a recommended bibliography of at least 8 books or other resources which are appropriate for the student's study topic and the student's level of comprehension. The process of study planning may be extended if necessary to 4 weeks (instead of the usual 2 weeks) so that new students, working with their professors, understand this process thoroughly.

[Note: Further information on independent study may be found on page 24 and in Appendix 2 of this document.]

## PROGRAM ACADEMIC AND RESIDENCY CALENDARS

For up-to-date information on tuition and fees, please see the Business Office page on the website and click on the Tuition button. Then click on Bachelor of Arts. Or use this link for detailed information: <http://www.myunion.edu/admissions/cost.html>

### OFFICIAL TERM DATES FOR THE 2012-2013 ACADEMIC YEAR:

**Fall 2012:** Begins officially August 27, 2012. Ends officially December 15, 2012

**Winter 2012:** Begins officially January 2, 2013. Ends officially April 29, 2013

**Spring-Summer 2012:** Begins officially April 29, 2013. Ends officially August 17, 2013

- Session One (eight weeks): April 30 –June 22, 2013
- Session Two (eight weeks): June 24-August 17, 2013

**Note: Official dates may not correspond to residency dates. See below for residency dates.**

### DATES OF RESIDENCIES, 2012-2013

#### Weekend:

**Fall:** August 25-26 (Orientation: Aug. 24)    **Winter:** January 5-6 (Orient: Jan. 4)

Sept. 8-9

Jan. 19-20

Oct. 6-7

Feb. 16-17

Nov. 10-11

Mar. 16-17

Dec. 15-16

April 27-28

**B.A. Online: Fall:** Aug. 18-21; Sept. 1-2. Ending residency: Dec. 14-16, 2012

**Winter:** Jan. 5-8; Jan. 19-20, 2013. Ending residency: April 18-20, 2013

### SCHOOL CLOSING POLICY

In the event of inclement weather during brief residencies that will imperil students' travel to and from the campus, the Dean of the Vermont Academic Center will post an announcement on the telephone (ext. 8740) and release closing information to media outlets (television and radio).

## **LIBERAL STUDIES MAJOR: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Grounded in adult developmental theory as well as Dewey's principles of progressive education, the Liberal Studies major at Union Institute & University offers students an opportunity to enlarge their minds and their creativity and to claim the power of their voice. Liberal Studies is liberal in the traditional sense of nurturing the human intellect but goes beyond the traditional in believing that intellect works in concert with feeling and spirit.

Adult students bring knowledge and experience with them. They have deep interests and passions, as well as educational needs. The B.A. Program recognizes this through emphasizing the role of independent study in obtaining the degree. In our program, faculty mentors (whom we call Professors) consult with the student and help each individual develop a course of study and direction. Listening carefully, they help bring students' specific questions into relationship with the liberal arts disciplines, expressed in the seven degree criteria. The professor helps the student formulate questions and goals, plan for the exact work that will be done, assemble a bibliography of resources, and determine a timeline of when work is due. When the student submits work, the professor responds promptly with comments and questions, providing alternative perspectives and information. In summary, the professor and student work together, bringing sustained attention to authoritative works (books, articles, etc.), and learning from and engaging with their sources by means of critical reading, thinking and writing. The two of them engage in this "vigorous dialogue" throughout the term, with professors serving both to support and challenge the students. Professors affirm students' developing knowledge and skills and encourage them to take intellectual risks and to think more deeply, critically, and flexibly.

Beyond working individually with a professor, students also collaborate and exchange ideas with one another. Students become part of an educational community whose aim is to guide and support them as they develop practical, relevant, meaningful questions and make connections among their own and others' studies. Residencies provide opportunities for students to listen to diverse voices, as well as to speak of their own interests and experiences.

Seminars provide another opportunity for students to collaborate with fellow students under faculty direction. Seminars are designed to be interdisciplinary. Students are encouraged to use seminars to broaden their interests and take intellectual risks, knowing that they will be supported by faculty members who will encourage both collaboration and individual choice.

Throughout both independent study and seminar work, strong emphasis is put on the development of each student's individual voice--through effective writing and the ability to communicate clearly in a variety of forms and for a variety of purposes. Relevant reflection, more than recitation of disembodied, impersonal facts, ultimately enables students to claim an education that transforms and strengthens their sense of self and agency.

## **LIBERAL STUDIES MAJOR: CORE KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The B.A. program offers one major: liberal studies. In order to graduate, students must earn at least 120 credits, fulfill the following learning outcomes for the major, and declare a concentration of at least 30 credits beyond the introductory level.

**Criterion 1:** The ability to write clear English prose, to speak effectively, and to read and understand material that does not require specialized vocabularies.

Before their final semester, all students are expected to produce substantive, literate, academic writing. Such writing makes significant points in an argument or thesis, substantiates these points with detail drawn from appropriate reading and experience, and integrates this detail through paraphrase and short and long quotations. All such references are documented in the Modern Language Association [MLA] or American Psychological Association [APA] style.

Each semester's faculty evaluation will include an overall assessment of the student's academic writing skills and will deal specifically with (1) fluency, clarity, and literacy; (2) the incorporation of references and resources into the writing; (3) accurate documentation of these references. Faculty evaluation of student's work will make specific mention of writing deficiencies to be corrected in future semesters.

Overall, the minimum expectations for literate academic writing are detailed in Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003) ISBN 0-312-39767-4 (also see: <http://www.dianahacker.com/>). Use of this reference is required for students in the program. This criterion is addressed every semester of enrollment in the program.

**Criterion 2:** The ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems

In practical terms this criterion means the ability to focus broad interests into questions that can be pursued systematically. Procedures engaged in this pursuit include formulating fruitful questions, breaking large problems into components, understanding problems or questions from different perspectives, evaluating a variety of arguments and perspectives, and, backed by evidence, formulating one's own interpretation. This criterion is addressed every semester.

**Criterion 3:** A knowledge of contemporary cultures and their foundations

Calling for critical reflection on individual, social, and environmental interactions and concerns, this criterion may be met by study in history AND in at least two of the academic disciplines of anthropology, business, environmental studies, geography, economics, political science, psychology and sociology. [The equivalent of 3 college-level courses]

**Criterion 4:** An awareness of ethical, moral, and spiritual concerns

These concerns address the beliefs, attitudes, motives and practices which shape our relationships to the social and natural world, and which underlie our ideals about what is good,

desirable, true or right. Although every study can offer opportunities to reflect on these concerns, they may also be explored through focused studies in such areas as philosophy, religion, feminist theory, and law. [The equivalent of one college-level course]

**Criterion 5:** An appreciation of aesthetics

Such academic study aims at an understanding of aesthetic experience through the study of literature, which may include creative writing, AND through study and studio work in one or more of the primarily nonverbal fine arts: painting, drawing, photography, music, dance, or others. [The equivalent of 2 college-level courses]

**Criterion 6:** An awareness of quantitative and scientific methodologies

The program expects its undergraduates to develop abilities to make inferences and draw conclusions from numerical data, and to acquire an articulated understanding of the physical and natural world. In addition, the program expects students to be aware of the scientific method as one among many ways of knowing. Such awareness may include a sense of the history, uses and critiques of scientific methodology, and the relationships among scientific and non-scientific disciplines and society. [The equivalent of 2 college-level courses]

**Criterion 7:** A commitment to active and positive participation in the world

Learning embraces not only the acquisition of content knowledge but also the cultivation and practice of reflective thinking and action. Students are encouraged in all semesters and required in at least one semester to demonstrate the integration of their studies into the experience of their everyday lives and to reflect on the reciprocal interactions between learning and doing. In addressing this criterion students demonstrate an awareness of the social implications of their studies. In this way we encourage students to view their education as an expression of their commitment to active and positive participation in the world, which in the words of John Dewey, involves the “continual reorganization, reconstruction, and transformation of experience.”

# CONCENTRATIONS

To earn the B.A. degree with a major in Liberal Studies, students must develop and complete a coherent curriculum with a concentration of at least 30 semester hours (15 of which may be transfer credit). The chosen concentration should be designed to insure depth of learning beyond the introductory level.

The concentrations are:

1. Psychology & Human Development
2. Arts, Writing, & Literature
3. Global Studies, History & Culture
4. Environmental Studies & Sustainability
5. Education Studies & Teacher Licensure
6. Self-designed Concentration

## THE SIX CONCENTRATIONS: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS AND CORE KNOWLEDGE

*Union Institute and University offers the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies. Students choose a concentration within that major. Each concentration addresses five dimensions of learning appropriate to the concentration: Methods, Theories and Concepts, History/Context, Controversies and Application. These dimensions are referenced in each of the concentration descriptions below, some directly and some more indirectly. For further information, please consult a core faculty member in the concentration.*

### **PSYCHOLOGY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**Conceptual Framework:** Broadly defined, the concentration in Psychology and Human Development focuses on the growth and development of individuals through the life course. Students are encouraged to formulate relevant questions and learn how these questions can be conceptualized and examined from a psychological perspective. Studies examine individuals' behaviors, characteristics, attitudes, and psychological problems. Such study necessarily embeds individuals in their social contexts, whether that is families, small groups, schools, subcultures, or the larger society and culture. It can and does incorporate applications aimed at solving or ameliorating individual and social problems.

The Psychology and Human Development concentration encourages a multidisciplinary approach to the examination of psychological questions. Such inquiry may include the biological, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of human behavior and mental processes.

**Core knowledge:** The core knowledge of this concentration occurs in the following domains:

- **Methods** -- involves the development of questions and hypotheses appropriate to psychological inquiry and the tools for constructing knowledge – for example, observational and experimental methods, uses of interviews, surveys, questionnaires, tests, etc.

- **Theories and Concepts** -- includes theoretical systems, philosophical underpinnings, and key ideas addressed in an individual study and in the field of psychology more generally.
- **History/Context** – includes the beginnings and evolution over time of psychology as a field of study, situating it with respect to other disciplinary approaches
- **Controversies** -- recognizes multiple perspectives and approaches within psychology and between psychology and related fields. Where are there disagreements within this field of study and between psychology and other fields? What are the social, ethical, and historical relevance of these controversies?
- **Applications** -- involves the study of methods aimed at ameliorating individual and social problems through psychological understanding and intervention. Also asks student to consider how the new learning is applied in the student's life, family and/or community.

History, theories, methods, controversies and applications may be understood and elaborated through an array of study topics including any of the following areas of inquiry:

- Psychology as a discipline (history, methods of inquiry, tools of inquiry, the science of behavior and what that means – e.g., findings arrived at via scientific method, hypotheses, testing theories, revising based on new findings, etc.)
- Psychology focused on development: growth- and age-related aspects and processes – e.g., in infancy, preschool, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, elderly individuals.
- Psychology and health (wellness, mind-body, disorders, stress, substance abuse, bodily functions (eating, sleeping, dreaming, sexuality)
- Psychology as a method of healing (individual and group psychotherapy and counseling; medication, alternative treatments, mind/body issues, spiritual healing)
- Psychology focused on cognition and cognitive science (brain and behavior, consciousness, perception, attention, memory, language, thinking, reasoning, learning)
- Psychology focused on personality (the self, motivation, emotion and feeling, individual differences)
- Psychology focused on social contexts and interactions (social roles, social cognition, social comparison, behavior in groups, crowd behavior, communication, competition, aggression, conformity)
- Non-Western and other models (cross-cultural, Buddhist psychology, ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology).

Note: content in parentheses is illustrative and not exclusive

### **Representative Outcomes:**

- The student describes at least two theories of development or personality; compares and contrasts them; and explains her/his own preferences or conclusions and why. The student demonstrates understanding of and an ability to use concepts accurately.
- The student explains at least two different methods of gathering data and arriving at findings and articulates why and how each method is appropriate for the question being addressed
- The student describes an application of psychological knowledge that shows how it uses psychological research and theories and articulates the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

### **Specialization within the concentration: Addiction Studies**

Students interested in earning certification in substance abuse counseling may follow a relatively prescribed curriculum that consists of two independent studies and one seminar (worth 30 credits). This curriculum was developed by a nationally certified Substance Abuse counselor who has set up these programs in other universities. The Addiction Studies specialization and the B.A. degree provide students with the educational credits and 2,000 hours toward the work experience requirements for certification by state licensing boards as a Substance Abuse Counselors. The Vermont Alcohol and Drug Abuse Certification Board (VADACB) has determined that the BA curriculum meets the substance abuse counseling training requirements and approved it. Other state approvals include Georgia, Hawaii, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Puerto Rico. Most state boards make individual determinations, so students from other states should check with their state licensing boards.

### **BA Collaborative Agreement with the M.A. in Psychology & Counseling Program**

Union Institute & University's masters-level programs collaborate with the B.A. program to provide a streamlined admissions process. In the case of the M.A. in Psychology and Counseling, the M.A. program waives the \$50 application fee but requires the application essay since it is part of the planning process.

Dual Enrollment: Certain students with outstanding academic skills and significant background in psychology may be eligible to enroll simultaneously for their final 9 credits in the BA and their first 9 credits in the M.A. in Psychology – Counseling program. Process:

- Student completes all B.A. degree criteria and a culminating study.
- Student petitions Educational Issues Committee for dual-enrollment status. Petition includes recommendation from two faculty members.
- Student applies for entry into the M.A. in Psychology—Counseling program and is accepted.
- Student registers for 9 credits in the M.A. program, passing the courses with a grade of B or better.
- Student is retroactively issued a B.A. diploma and continues with the M.A. program having completed the first 9 credits.

## **THE ARTS, WRITING & LITERATURE**

**Conceptual Framework**: This concentration, which includes both the visual and written arts, is appropriate for students with a studio focus in writing and/or visual art as well as for students focusing on literature and art history/visual culture without a studio component.

Knowledge of literature and art deepen our understanding of the human experience. In part, depth of understanding comes from the knowledge that art and literature exist in a social context. For example, if a student were to study the writing, drawing, collage, and performance arts of Europe in 1917, comprehending the work might require looking at the ways in which those artists and writers were influenced by World War I and the Second Industrial Revolution. Similarly, students develop a lens for understanding their own work as influenced by the social context in which they live.

**Core Knowledge**: A concentration in the arts, writing, & literature requires extended exploration

(30 credits) in the student's general area of focus. Whether exploring the visual or written arts, each student becomes aware of the range of forms and genres as he or she discovers his or her own voice. In studio studies, media might include drawing, sculpture, collage, photography, performance, new media, and music, among others. Forms of writing might include poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, flash fiction, and journalism, among others. Students learn to view and/or read with depth and critical perspective, reflect on form and content, analyze literature and art in an historical context, and articulate their perceptions. The fields encompassed by this concentration are broad and interdisciplinary; students may well consider connections to philosophy, psychology, anthropology, feminism, and popular culture, among other disciplines, as they relate to the student's own ideas and questions.

**Representative Outcomes:**

- In creative (studio) studies in writing and visual arts, students demonstrate deep engagement and technical development in creative work. Deep engagement is evident in a completed body of work that indicates a disciplined creative practice and consequent technical growth.
- In literature and art history/visual culture studies, students demonstrate comprehension of the relevant literary genre or period in art history/visual culture. This is indicated through a student's academic writing, through faculty-student dialogue, and through presentation and critique.
- Students demonstrate an understanding that the visual and written arts exist in a social context. In addition, students demonstrate an understanding of relevant controversies in their area of inquiry by expressing different perspectives on a topic and presenting their own conclusions, backed by evidence.

**GLOBAL STUDIES, HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**Conceptual Framework:** This concentration addresses both the humanities and the social sciences. Global studies, history, anthropology, women's and gender studies, religion, spirituality and ethics, geography, sociology, political science, economics, communications and media, and holistic studies provide context and framework for questions that students pose about their own society and the world at large. It also provides a platform for constructing knowledge about the world.

**Core Knowledge:** The Global Studies, History and Culture concentration is an investigation of individuals and groups in their social and cultural contexts. It requires that students situate their inquiry in a scholarly context and pursue the content, methodologies, theoretical questions and history of their chosen fields.

Students often approach their studies in an interdisciplinary manner. For example, students can pursue area studies in American Studies, Middle Eastern studies, or other regions of the world. Such a focus could encompass history, culture (including literature and arts), politics, economy and geography. Students may also focus specifically on any of the areas named in the conceptual framework above – for example, women's studies, anthropology, or religion.

As with all concentrations, Global Studies, History and Culture requires 30 credits in which students will learn to gather evidence, weigh and sift information, write academic essays, and correctly document sources. They will learn, practice and incorporate critical thinking skills throughout their studies.

With their Bachelor's degrees, students in this concentration build a firm foundation for journalism, teaching, archival and museum work, business and management, public policy and planning, writing, law, human services, government, community development and advocacy. Many graduates continue in graduate school in law, the humanities, or social sciences. Students often undertake religious, spiritual or holistic studies because they plan to pursue studies for the ministry or graduate work in the healing professions.

### **Representative Outcomes:**

Students will:

- Articulate a coherent description of the intent and scope of the approach that they have taken to their academic work within this concentration.
- Demonstrate the ability to conduct research and collect information and sources that are credible, reliable, and current; and to use this research to write academic essays that are adequately documented.
- Describe a controversial topic, question or position within their area of inquiry, describe differing positions, and convincingly explain their viewpoint, backed by evidence.

### **Collaborative Arrangement with the Master of Arts Program of UI&U**

B.A. graduates may take advantage of a streamlined admissions process if they seek to enroll in the Master's program. The application fee is waived, as is the requirement to write an application essay and provide references. Instead, the BA graduate supplies the name of a professor in the B.A. program who is familiar with his/her work.

Dual-Enrollment: Strong applicants may seek dual enrollment such that they earn their final 6 credits in the B.A. program while simultaneously earning the first 6 credits toward a master's degree. Process:

- Student completes all B.A. degree criteria and a culminating study.
- Student petitions Educational Issues Committee for dual-enrollment status. Petition includes recommendation from two faculty members.
- Student applies for entry into the Master of Arts program and is accepted.
- Student registers for 6 credits in the M.A. program, passing the courses with a grade of B or better.
- Student is retroactively issued a B.A. diploma and continues with the M.A. program having completed the first 6 credits.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES & SUSTAINABILITY**

**Conceptual Framework:** Earth, both in itself and within the larger context of the universe, can be seen as a set of complex unfolding processes and relationships in which we are embedded and on which we are dependent. In light of our enormous technical abilities and burgeoning population, it is especially important now to assess humanity's impact on and responsibility for the state of the planet. The environmental studies and sustainability concentration allows students to explore environmental issues from an interdisciplinary perspective, understanding that complex issues require a complex approach. The interdisciplinary aspect, for example, recognizes sustainability not just in terms of the planet but also in economic and social terms. Students regularly include experiential components in their studies, which ground the theory and concepts they explore, allowing their insight to develop through direct contact with and observation of the natural world, and interactions between humans and nature. Over the course of their studies, students will place what they have learned into a framework that is multifaceted, complex, and always supported by their own experience.

**Core Knowledge:** The environmental studies concentration is inherently interdisciplinary. It draws on the investigation of natural science through studies in the history, methods, theories, and current controversies in ecology, including knowledge of the ways that statistics and mathematics are used to describe natural processes. Also, students explore the relationship of humans to the natural world from historical and ethical perspectives, and investigate environmental issues and the implications of human actions using methods from the sciences and/or social sciences. Further, sustainability is conceptualized as going beyond sustainable environmental practices to include economic sustainability and social justice. Beyond this foundation, students may look at the natural world and environmental concerns through the lenses of literature, philosophy, applications such as technology and management, religion and spirituality, art, public policy, and the social sciences. Each of these perspectives suggests a different type of experiential component to enrich the study.

### **Representative Outcomes**

- Articulate how the natural and social sciences support an understanding of the earth and its inhabitants as in a constantly dynamic, responsive process.
- Analyze environmental issues involving individuals, human and natural communities, and institutions from different disciplinary perspectives.
- Evaluate ethical stances in relation to general or particular environmental concerns, and discuss the reasons and justifications that support particular values.
- Demonstrate an understanding of how nature is studied and understood by people in different academic fields and different cultures.

## **EDUCATION STUDIES & TEACHER LICENSURE**

**Conceptual Framework:** Education Studies is designed for students who are not seeking teacher licensure but who are interested in exploring educational issues from an interdisciplinary liberal arts perspective. (For Teacher Licensure, see below). The field encompasses a variety of topics in the social, psychological, political, cultural, and economic dimensions of education. A primary area of focus is the complex relationship between the purposes and effects of schooling. Within this broad

category students investigate such topics as: the role of schools in a diverse democracy; the relationships among families, communities, and schools; elite education vs. universal access; adult education; content mastery vs. the construction of knowledge and meaning; and the effects of local, state, and federal policy on student achievement. Students explore such issues through reading, research, experiential learning, reflection, and critical analysis.

### **Core knowledge**

- **Methods** -- Students will develop an awareness of the methodological lenses available in the various social sciences to examine educational issues and will be conversant with the various ways that researchers use evidence to draw conclusions. They will become familiar enough with both quantitative and qualitative methods to act as sophisticated consumers of education research and program evaluation.
- **Theories and Concepts** -- Students will describe the fundamental concepts of teaching and learning, and will trace various instructional approaches to their theoretical roots. Because our program draws inspiration from the work of philosopher John Dewey and constructivist models of learning and human development, students are expected to be particularly knowledgeable about progressive education.
- **History/Context** -- Students will understand the evolution of educational theory and practice over time and the changing role of schools in democratic societies. Multiple perspectives on the purposes and effects of schooling will facilitate critical analysis of past and present reform efforts.
- **Controversies** -- Students will describe current debates in educational policy and classroom practice, and will develop the tools to analyze competing claims about the effectiveness of interventions and improvement efforts.
- **Application** -- Students will draw on the skills developed in the areas described above to investigate and evaluate important issues in education. They will demonstrate the ability to access information from reliable resources and will use them to critically analyze the issue under study.

### **Representative Outcomes**

- Explain current controversies in education and critically analyze the implications of current school reform efforts.
- Apply principles of human development to an examination of classroom practice and curriculum development.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the role of education in a democracy and identify the tensions inherent in the dual functions of increasing access to equal opportunity and contributing to social stratification through sorting and selection mechanisms.

### **Specialization within the Concentration: Teacher Licensure\***

- Union Institute & University's Bachelor of Arts program is approved by the Vermont Department of Education to prepare teachers for licensure in early childhood education, elementary education, secondary English, secondary social studies, and K-12 art education. Adult students who have already met their math or science major may prepare for secondary math or science licensure.
- Candidates for teacher licensure must complete a liberal arts concentration along with their education requirements. In secondary fields, this must be in the discipline relevant to the

license. For early childhood or elementary education, the concentration may be in any non-professional field.

- Students receive a Vermont license to teach upon successful completion of the program's teacher education option. Vermont has reciprocal agreements with 48 states. The Vermont Department of Education lists these reciprocal agreements. Please note that teacher education students need to pass both the PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II assessments. Consult your enrollment counselor to learn when you need to take these tests.

**\*Teacher Licensure requires 42 credits (3 terms) in the weekend residency option.**

### **SELF-DESIGNED CONCENTRATION**

**Conceptual Framework:** When students have interests and questions that cross the boundaries of academic disciplines yet do not fit easily into any of the other areas of concentration, they may work with an advisor to devise a self-designed concentration. Such a concentration may involve concepts, ideas and/or themes such as “freedom,” or focus more closely on areas that do not fit easily into other concentrations such as “holistic studies” or “entrepreneurship” or “women’s health” or “studies for the ministry,” which the student wants to understand through inquiry into two or more disciplines, such as literature, art, philosophy, economics, history, political science, mathematics and the natural sciences. In this case, the conceptual framework would necessarily involve understanding how the subject of inquiry is dealt with in each discipline, as well as knowledge of the disciplines themselves. Or the student’s work may involve core knowledge from more than one area, such as environmental design, which would require deep understanding in both environmental studies and the arts; or business, which requires core knowledge in psychology, ethics, mathematics and policy. If a student feels that her or his most desired areas of inquiry do not fit within the delineated concentrations, s/he can work with the faculty to design and agree upon a self-designed concentration, with relevant core knowledge, methods and outcomes specified.

**Core knowledge:** The core knowledge necessary for any particular thematic concentration would necessarily be specific to the theme the student has identified.

#### **Representative Outcomes**

- Identify the relevant academic disciplines and articulate the relationships among those disciplines
- Develop and use the skills necessary for investigation
- Utilize the methods generally used in the core disciplines
- Articulate her or his perspective and positions on issues of consequence within the area(s) of inquiry

# GENERAL ACADEMIC POLICIES

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Union Institute & University Policy on Academic Integrity and its procedural guidelines can be found on the University Policies web page: <http://www.myunion.edu/about/university-policies/index.html>

## OFFICIAL WRITING POLICIES AND HANDBOOK OF THE B.A. PROGRAM

The B.A. program is a writing-intensive program; student writing is evaluated in detail after every term. The official writing handbook of the program is Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference* (Bedford/St. Martin's, fifth edition and above). Use of gender-neutral language is policy of the BA program and Union Institute & University.

## INCOMPLETE AND ACADEMIC EXTENSION POLICIES FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES

1. To successfully complete a 9- or 12-credit independent study (or 15-credit culminating studies, with permission), students must maintain solid dialogue with their professors and read/write according to the number of credits they registered for.
  - 9 credits: Dialogue letters + 12 books, 24 pages of finished writing
  - 12 credits: Dialogue letters + 16 books, 32 pages of finished writing
  - 15 credits: Dialogue letters + 20 books, 40 pages of finished writing
2. Students may withdraw from a term up until the official final day of the term. The student must advise his/her Program Advisor directly, in writing (email) or by telephone, of the wish to withdraw. Withdrawal results in a W on the student's transcript. After 5 weeks, there is no tuition rebate for withdrawal.
3. Students who have completed three-quarters (75%) of the term's work (dialogue letters + 12 books, 24 pages for 12-credit study; dialogue letters + 9 books and 18 pages for 9-credit study) but have not satisfied the full quantity and dialogue requirements for the term may take an Incomplete, at no extra charge. Students must fill out the Incomplete Study Plan with their professor. Students who elect to take an Incomplete have 60 days after the end of the Incomplete term in which to complete the work. After 60 days, the grade of Incomplete automatically turns into an Unsatisfactory. [Under exceptional circumstances, including an ADA accommodation, this deadline can be extended by petition to the Associate Dean.]
4. Students who elect an Incomplete for an independent study or seminar may not register for more than 9 credits in the following term. If they fulfill the Incomplete in a very timely manner, within the 45 day add/drop period, they may elect an additional 3 credits with their professor's approval.

5. Students who have completed at least one-half of the required work may register for an Academic Extension to complete the study, with the agreement of their professor and the Dean or Associate Dean, An Academic Extension costs approximately \$1300 extra. Students have until the end of the following term to complete the work. No new registration is allowed while registered for an Academic Extension. Financial Aid will not cover the cost of an Academic Extension. The time spent on academic extension may affect the financial aid grace period (see #7 below).
6. In both weekend and online options, students should attend any final residency, participate in final study group experiences, and present their study's progress-to-date to the study group. Students taking an incomplete or academic extension of the final culminating study may not participate fully in graduation ceremonies or receive a diploma until they have completed the work and met all degree requirements and financial obligations with the University. Students may participate in a later graduation of their choice.
7. **IMPORTANT:** To understand the impact on their financial aid of withdrawing from the term or taking an incomplete or extension, students must check with the Financial Aid office. This is such an individualized issue that Program Advisors and the Learning Services Coordinator cannot advise them. Financial Aid information appears as a Quick Link connection on the upper right hand side of the website, <http://www.myunion.edu> Contact information for Financial Aid:
  - Email:** [finaid@myunion.edu](mailto:finaid@myunion.edu)
  - Locally:** 513.861.6400 ext. 2005
  - Toll-free:** 800.486.3116 ext. 2005
  - Fax:** 1.513.487.1078

## **GRADES**

All students are encouraged to obtain their satisfactory/unsatisfactory grades through CampusWeb. Unofficial copies of the narrative faculty transcript evaluations should be requested from the professor. Official narrative transcripts and grade reports are not mailed to students. If you need a more "official" copy of your grade report (for tuition reimbursement from employers, etc.), the official transcript request form should be used for this purpose (<http://www.myunion.edu/forms/Form092.pdf>).

Note that a grade of "C" is the equivalent of a 2.0 GPA.

## **LETTER GRADE EQUIVALENT PROCESS**

Students occasionally need letter grades for reimbursement from their place of employment or for graduate school applications. Process:

- The student sends a written request via e-mail to the appropriate Program Advisor. The request must include:
  - Student's full legal name
  - The dates of the term(s) for which the grade equivalent is being requested

- The reason for requesting the letter grade equivalent
- The names and addresses to which the letter from the dean are to be sent. (The student will receive a copy of the letter for her/his personal records.)
- The Program Advisor forwards the request to the relevant professor(s) along with copies of their narrative evaluations of the student's work available in her/his academic record.
- The professors send the letter grade equivalent (A, B, or C) to the program advisor, who forwards the letter grade equivalent to the dean.
- The associate dean sends the official letter based on the grade equivalents recommended by the faculty. In cases where professors are no longer contracted by the University, the associate dean will award the grade equivalent based on a careful reading of the narrative evaluation in the record.

## **INTERRUPTIONS IN ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

Arrangements for all interruptions in academic progress must be made through the B.A. program office. (See above for procedures for taking incompletes and withdrawal.)

Early Registration forms are sent to students prior to each semester. Failure to submit this completed form within the specified deadline will result in the student being coded as NR (not registered) with the Registrar. After 3 terms of being coded NR, the student is administratively withdrawn from the program.

All interruptions in academic progress affect the student's financial aid. Students should consult the University financial aid office for information and details.

## **STUDENT COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS**

Students who experience problems should first take up their concerns with the appropriate program advisor and their professor. The next point of appeal is the Associate Dean. If they do not receive satisfaction and therefore wish to make a complaint about academic process or procedure, or if they wish to appeal a decision or request an exception to a policy, they should do so in writing, addressing their remarks to the Dean of the B.A. program.

For further details about registering a complaint (academic or non-academic), refer to the Student Complaints and Appeals policy and procedure, found on the Institutional Policies Web page <http://www.myunion.edu/about/university-policies/index.html>

## **INDEPENDENT STUDIES IN THE B.A. PROGRAM**

### **PLANNING AN INDEPENDENT STUDY**

#### **Participation in Study Exploration**

During the first academic residency, each student must meet with at least three professors to discuss ideas and possible topics for studies and to ascertain how the professor could help support the student in carrying out the study. After these exploratory discussions, the student fills out a Preliminary Study Proposal and hands it in according to the residency schedule.

### **Preliminary Study Proposal and Assignment of Faculty**

The Preliminary Study Proposal briefly summarizes the idea(s) and questions that the student proposes to study. It may include more than one proposed study. The Preliminary Study Proposal lists at least three potential professors with whom the student has discussed the proposed ideas/study. Each student is assigned one professor for that term's independent study.

### **Working with the Same Professor Only Twice**

With some exceptions granted only on a case-by-case basis and agreed upon by the faculty, students can work with one advisor for no more than two independent study terms during the course of their degree program. (Studying with a faculty member in a seminar does not count here.)

### **Signed Final Study Plan is an Academic Agreement**

The Study Plan constitutes an academic agreement between the student and professor and must include at least the following elements, filled in clearly and thoroughly on the study plan form. The study plan must be signed and dated by the professor and the student.

- The number of credits for which the student is registered
- Student's questions, goals and inquiry process
- Work the student will produce
- The professor's role in the project
- The exact dates of submission of work in progress
- Preliminary bibliography

### **Inclusion of Outside Coursework or Learning Activity**

When a student includes an outside learning activity in a term of independent study, it is expected that:

- The outside activity will be part of the study plan and will be discussed in the written exchanges with the advisor
- The study plan and evaluation will reflect the inclusion of the outside component in the term's work
- The final student and faculty evaluations will refer to qualitative and quantitative reports of the outside activity (i.e. letter, grade report, narrative evaluation, etc.)
- This documentation of the outside activity will be attached to the student's final evaluation and become part of the student's internal program file. No additional credit toward the degree is granted for outside coursework taken during a regular full-time term.

## **THE FINAL INDEPENDENT STUDY**

### **Culminating Studies**

See "Guidelines for the Culminating Study" in the appendix of this document. Culminating studies must be full-time (12-credits). Students may petition to the Educational Issues Committee for a 15-credit culminating study. Recommendation by a prior professor is required. Students should

discuss this desire for a 15-credit study further with their Program Advisor and petition at least two months before the term begins.

### **Culminating Presentations**

A student will prepare and deliver a presentation of the culminating study during the appropriate residency. Professors will consult with students as necessary to support them in planning presentations that convey the learning achieved during the culminating study.

### **Second Readers for Culminating Studies**

Each culminating study will be assigned a second faculty reader (in addition to the student's professor) to confirm the quality of the work accomplished and to provide feedback to the professor. All second reader comments are communicated to the advisor and not directly to the student.

The Second Reader is not a second professor and does not see any work until the final material is submitted. The Second Reader reviews the quality and overall content of the culminating project, rather than oversee editorial detail, although second readers will frequently note typographical errors, spelling errors, etc. All written products of culminating studies should be correct in grammar, punctuation, typography, paragraphing, and spelling and, of course, content.

### **Advisor's Presentation of Culminating Study to the Faculty**

The professor for each culminating study presents the study in a residency faculty meeting by reading the final evaluation aloud or via threaded discussion in the online option, followed by the response of the second reader. The culminator's professor concludes with a recommendation for graduation with the concurrence of the faculty in attendance.

### **Formatting Extension for Culminating Studies**

Students completing the culminating study may take a three-week extension in order to have the study product transferred electronically in proper form. If this is the final term, the student may participate in the graduation ceremony since a formatting extension is **granted only when all the work of the study is finished, the evaluations have been submitted, and everything is done except the final transmission**. Students with formatting extensions will have faculty approval of the final drafts of their studies. At the end of the term, a diploma will be issued and sent to the graduate by mail. If the three-week formatting extension extends beyond the end of the term, the diploma will be issued upon final approval of the completed final study. If the final paper is not received within the specified three weeks, the formatting extension reverts to an incomplete, which must be completed within 60 days.

## **EVALUATING THE INDEPENDENT STUDY**

### **Evaluation of Student Work by Faculty**

All academic and creative work for each term is evaluated in writing (narrative evaluation). The professor also assigns a Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U). The faculty evaluation then becomes part of the student's official transcript. [Note: A grade of S is translated by the registrar's office as being a grade of C or better.]

Each term of study will be evaluated according to the following:

- **Quantity of work:** a quantitative assessment of the amount of reading, writing, research, revision, interviewing and creating.
- **Quality of work:** an assessment of the study and its final product, including scope, clarity, organization, insight and originality.
- **Vigorous dialogue:** an assessment of the process of the study. Note: "Vigorous Dialogue" requires that substantive student and faculty written interaction occurs about the content of the study at regular intervals, specified in the Independent Study Plan, over the course of the term.
- **Growth:** an assessment of the student's progress, including increased skill, mastery of material, and increased confidence and creativity.

### **Restatement of Evaluation Standards for Student Self-Monitoring**

To help students self-monitor and assess their own work, the four main standards are presented below in a slightly revised form, to facilitate reflection.

- **Commitment to the study.** A quantitative measurement: amount of reading, writing, research, revision, interviewing, etc. (plus residency participation) and staying in touch with the advisor (once a month minimum). Extras: going to plays or poetry readings, writing to fellow students, visiting museums or worksites, etc. This is not simply a sincerity test. In short, have you put at least 20 hours a week into the study?
- **Vigorous Dialogue.** Engagement with the professor in the process of the study. Is your writing in letters and other materials detailed, insightful? Did you respond to questions and criticism? Did you seem open-minded, curious, involved in the study (the qualitative side of commitment)? Did you write these letters regularly, over the course of the whole term?
- **Growth/Progress.** Where did you academically move from and to during the study? Have you increased your skill levels, increased mastery of materials? Have you grown more objective, gained confidence, increased creativity, taken risks?
- **Quality of Products.** Are your papers well-organized, articulate, insightful, and ambitious? Are products such as poems, stories, a film, photographs, paintings, curriculum design, annotated bibliography or other appropriate documents included? Do they gather together, make connections among, and synthesize the material? Do they provide support for your arguments? Are they interesting, original? Are they bachelor's level work? Do they reflect appropriate progress toward the degree?

### **Minimum Standards for Successful Independent Study**

- At least 20 hours a week during the independent study (non-resident) part of the term must be devoted to the study. For the 9-credit option, 12 to 15 hours of study per week are required.
- Work in progress must be submitted a minimum of four times over the course of an independent-study term. Work in progress for part-time studies is submitted in at least three installments.
- Work on independent studies must be submitted at regular intervals, which ordinarily are planned in advance by the advisor and student and appear in the signed study plan. A timeline for submitting work allows for good dialogue between student and professor. Students should email their professor to advise him/her of any delays or problems. If no substantial work has been submitted by mid-term, an incomplete is the only option, if the student has completed 75% of work at term's end. If 75% of the work has not been submitted by term's end, the student will earn an Unsatisfactory for the term. [See Academic Extension option if

50% of work has been completed.]

- No new work will be accepted at the ending residency for Weekend or Online options. Midnight on the Wednesday before the last residency starts is the deadline for submitting new work. By the term's end, if three-quarters of the work has been completed, an incomplete may be granted. The student and professor will fill out an Incomplete Study Plan. All work must be finished and a grade reported by 60 days after the end of the incomplete term. Otherwise, the incomplete automatically becomes an Unsatisfactory. [In exceptional cases, including ADA incompletes, this date can be extended by petition to the Dean.]
- For a full-time independent study of 12 credits, students must engage in regular, substantial dialogue (via dialogue letters) and produce at least 32 pages of finished writing (in addition to dialogue letters, journal entries, and drafts) and read at least 16 approved books, or the faculty-approved equivalent. For part-time study, regular dialogue, 12 books and 24 pages of finished writing must be produced.
  - In the Arts concentration, students produce at least 32 pages of finished writing, which must include detailed writing on one's studio process and reflection on one's research. Of the required minimum of 16 books, four to five should be monograph and/or technical. An appropriate amount of studio work for any given medium is determined, in dialogue with a professor, during the study planning process.
- "Finished" writing implies work that has been revised or formal academic writing. The foundation of the B.A. program is reading, writing and vigorous dialogue. Vigorous dialogue means regular, frequent, and substantive written dialogue with the advisor on the subject matter of the study. Credit is not granted for studies lacking dialogue; merely completing the quantity (reading and writing) requirement is not sufficient. Similarly, studio work in the visual arts must demonstrate engagement in the process of dialogue and critique; simply submitting the required number of works is not sufficient.
- Students must submit the self-evaluation form [self-evaluation and final study bibliography] to their professor for comment. After making any suggested revisions, this form is returned to the professor, who will submit it to the BA Program office. This material becomes part of the student's B.A. program file. A written evaluation of the student's work by the professor, the Faculty Transcript Evaluation, is also submitted for each such term's work. This constitutes the official transcript. The professor will share this transcript evaluation with the student.
- Failure to meet minimum standards will result in a grade of Unsatisfactory recorded on the transcript and a faculty narrative evaluation specifying what work the student did and did not complete, along with reasons for the unsatisfactory grade.

## **ACADEMIC SUPPORT**

Tutorial assistance is available for students who are not able to maintain the minimum academic quality expectations of the B.A. program and its faculty.

Process for acquiring University-sponsored tutorial assistance:

- Student discusses academic needs with her/his professor.
- Professor makes a recommendation to the associate dean for tutorial assistance for the current term and notifies the student's advisor.

- The associate dean will assign a tutor who is familiar with the B.A. program and qualified to provide assistance with basic college level reading, writing, and thinking skills or a particular aspect of the student's studies as recommended by the professor.
- If students wish to use a local tutor, any candidates for such a position must be discussed with the associate dean and the person's resume supplied, including qualifications for and experience with college-level tutoring.. The associate dean should also receive contact information for that candidate, telephone and/or e-mail.
- Upon approval by the Dean or Associate Dean, a contract will be drawn up for the tutor. The student should begin working with the tutor as soon as possible. The tutor and professor will be supplied with guidelines for working together and working with the student in a productive, effective and collaborative manner.
- **Contact: B.A. Associate Dean: 802.828.8813**

## ADA SUPPORT

**Contact Devereaux Simon, ADA Coordinator**

**Phone: 802 828 8740. E-mail: [ADAcordinator@myunion.edu](mailto:ADAcordinator@myunion.edu).**

(See University catalog for details.)

## STUDENT SERVICES

**Gary Library:** [www.myunion.edu/library](http://www.myunion.edu/library)

**Career Counseling:** [www.myunion.edu/academics/career-counseling](http://www.myunion.edu/academics/career-counseling)

**Information Technology:** [www.myunion.edu/IT](http://www.myunion.edu/IT)

## GRADUATION CEREMONY PARTICIPATION

Each term, a graduation ceremony will be held for the Brattleboro and Montpelier weekend options on site in Vermont. In order to be eligible to participate in a B.A. graduation ceremony, a student's culminating study document and advisor's faculty transcript evaluation must be approved by the residency faculty and the student must have earned the 120 credits required for the degree.

Students in the online option are welcome to join the Vermont campus-based ceremonies at any point within a year of finishing all degree requirements and having been cleared by the registrar and business office for graduation.

All students also are welcome to participate in the annual University Commencement that most immediately follows full completion of all degree requirements. University commencement typically occurs on a Saturday in mid-October in Cincinnati, Ohio. Check the UI&U website for exact date. Students should contact the Learning Services Coordinator to receive a form reserving a place in the Cincinnati graduation, thus assuring that their name will be included in the program.

Diplomas (which are mailed to graduates by the Registrar's Office) and academic transcripts will be withheld until the term officially ends. The degree is noted on academic transcripts after academic and financial audits have been completed.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: PHYSICAL FACILITIES**

#### **Montpelier Center**

The offices of the Bachelor of Arts program are located in Stone Hall on the campus of The Vermont College of Fine Arts, which is within walking distance of hotels and restaurants in downtown Montpelier, Vermont, and within short driving distance from Interstate 89, exit 8. The building contains more than 4,000 square feet of space, which includes classrooms, faculty and staff offices, and a computer laboratory. The building is ADA compliant. During residency events, students have access to additional classrooms as well as dormitory facilities of The Vermont College of Fine Arts, and to food services provided by the New England Culinary Institute.

#### **Brattleboro Center**

The Brattleboro Center is located at the south end of Brattleboro, Vermont, close to Interstate 91, Brattleboro exit 1 and near downtown hotels and restaurants. The Center has offices, classrooms, meeting rooms, a computer lab, and faculty and staff offices. There is ample free parking.

Together the Brattleboro Center and the Montpelier Center form the Northeast Regional Center of Union Institute & University, complementing the Midwestern Regional Center and University headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Western Center in Sacramento and Los Angeles, California, and the Southeastern Regional Center in North Miami, Florida.

## Appendix 2: INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDELINES

### Developing the Study Plan

You are about to write a study plan. While it is not written in blood and can change, it does serve as a firm reference point for both you and your professor. There are many choices about how you will proceed and what you will do. The following is a set of ideas about how best to make these decisions.

### GOALS:

- **Be specific:** Don't plan to take on great areas of work without some specific "handle." Interested in Southern writers or visual artists? Perhaps you have grandparents with Southern roots and you've never quite understood them, or maybe racial tension in your city makes you curious about black-white relations in the rural south. Whatever your area of interest, try to pin it to some reference point in your own experience. If possible, express the main focus and goal of your study in the form of a fundamental, important question you want to answer, or a problem to investigate and solve.
- **Give yourself limits:** There is a temptation, especially in the heat of the residency, to take on topics that will ask lots of "big questions" at once. Do your best to resist this temptation. Set some limited and realistic goals for some concrete accomplishments that you are fairly sure you can complete in one 16-week term. If you can set these specific goals in priority order, you'll have an even clearer way to manage decisions about what-to-do-when during the term.
- **Leave room to change:** Whatever the logic of the project as you see it at the start, it will almost certainly be different by the end. Expect that initial rationales for the term's work may need modification at some point and that the core of the study may develop in other ways than originally anticipated.

### TIMING:

- **Set a pace for yourself:** Truth does not come in monthly packets and profound insights do not come out of the blue. The term will be most productive to you if, from the beginning, you can create a work pattern and stick to it. Before the residency is over, you should know what you are going to do **very specifically** on your study in the following three weeks. Plan what a day's or a week's work will look like: how will you block out approximately 20 hours a week? What can you do each day? What will you have to give up so that you can dedicate these hours to study? Set specific goals for the end of the first three weeks: what will you have to report in your first letter?
- **Work out a pattern for the whole term:** Laying out a tentative pattern of target dates for the main phases of your study will increase your chances of having a personally fulfilling independent study. Decide with your professor what dates you are going to submit your work. For 16-week terms it might make sense to submit work more frequently than every four weeks. Remember, you must submit your work at least 4 times for a full-time study. If at all possible, organize the term's work into segments, each of which has a fairly definite sense of closure. At the very least, plan a Midterm Evaluation with your professor, to assess how you are feeling about the study and to make needed changes for the second half of the term. Plan to have all work completed and sent to your professor **at least one week before the end of the term**. Check with your professor about dates to submit your work. During

the last few weeks, write a draft of your self-evaluation and gather the final study bibliography.

### **RESOURCES:**

- **Use everything you can find:** Your professor should steer you away from topics that are so narrow that you will run dry of resources or lose interest quickly. When you develop your bibliography of resources, be sure there are at least 16 books (or book equivalents) listed for a 12-credit study or 12 for a nine-credit study. Feel free to draw on sources in addition to books, but check with your professor about his/her guidelines related to other sources. Each study is somewhat different. Examples of other resources include: Interview and/or shadow people working in your area of interest; watch films, listen to recordings, or attend performances and lectures related to the subject; attend meetings of groups active on issues related to your topic; check out web resources dealing with your area of study, including TED talks, blogs, Khan Academy, and YouTube presentations; attend an all-day conference or workshops by professionals in the field. Think about how experiential learning could apply in the area of your study. Ask the Reference Librarian for help locating resources.

### **PRODUCTS:**

- **Choose products for your study carefully:** “Different strokes for different folks,” as the old saying says. Studies that are exploratory often don’t lend themselves to traditional term papers; a journal may not work as well as a series of short essays if you are surveying a subject about which you know relatively little. Non-verbal forms of communication can be used in studies not specifically about learning that medium (a history of early Boston may include sketches or photos and not just book reviews); likewise, a painting study may include some intense work in politics or literature. **THERE ARE MANY RIGHT WAYS TO STUDY.** But the wrong way is to create a product in which you have no personal interest or investment. So give lots of thought to how you want to present what you are learning. If your professor thinks you are taking on too much, or providing too little, s/he will say so. Don’t be afraid to experiment!

## Appendix 3: CULMINATING STUDY GUIDELINES

### Overview

*Culminator* is the B.A. program term for a student in her/his final independent term of study. The *culminating study* refers to the academic work accomplished during a final term. The culminating study ordinarily grows out of the B.A. concentration. Students pursue in-depth study, demonstrating the skills expected of a college graduate by producing a written document that is presented in academic form, clearly written, logically organized, researched, and appropriately documented. What follows are content, format, and submission guidelines for the culminating study.

### Content

The culminating study evolves out of your progress through the program and ordinarily demonstrates advanced and focused work in your concentration area. As with previous studies, culminating studies require the equivalent of at least 16 books of new reading for a 12-credit study; 20 books for a 15 credit study (undertaken with permission only). You may, however, make reference to ideas that you have explored in prior semesters, building on them and/or including specific references you read before the culminating term.

Your final document will become part of UI&U Library's permanent collection as an electronic document. Instructions for converting your final product into an electronic document are at the end of these guidelines. The document must follow the format below:

### **Components of the Final Document:**

- **Abstract:** The abstract is a short (one page maximum) summary of the document, similar to an expanded table of contents. It should include a statement of purpose and a sentence or two describing each chapter or section. It should be single-spaced.
- **Preface:** The culminating study begins here with reflection on and evaluation of your educational journey. The preface provides an opportunity to place this final study in the context of your previous B.A. program work, and, where relevant, in the context of other educational and/or life experiences that have contributed to your journey to this point. To that end, it may:
  - Tell the story of your progress to and through the program
  - Explain how you arrived at this particular culminating study project
  - Preview the culminating essay that follows
- **Body of Work:** The body of the work can take one of two basic forms:
  - A document of at least 8,000 words (10,000 words for a 15-credit study) of finished writing demonstrating the learning you accomplished in your final independent study term. Going beyond merely reporting, this document includes reflection upon new information you absorbed this term, reflection upon the scholarly ideas you studied, and reflection on your learning process. The document should cite or directly quote authors whose concerns are germane to your work, with appropriate acknowledgement in a "works cited" or "references" section. Note that these studies may also include creative studio work, a hybrid between this format and the one explained below.

- A studio study which includes both studio work and writing. The final product consists of an essay of at least 4,000 words (5,000 words for a 15-credit study) where you reflect on your own creative process and the work you accomplished; on the genre or medium used, including the most substantive issues it posed for you; and on the scholarly ideas you studied this term, above and beyond your own work. This reflective essay must include citations and/or direct quotations from authors whose concerns are germane to your work, with appropriate acknowledgement in a “works cited” or “references” section. In addition to the essay, the studio work, such as photographs, paintings, sculpture, short stories, non-fiction essays, poems, or chapters of a novel in progress, must be fully represented (slides, photographs, video tape, essay(s), poems, fiction, etc.) in the final product.

Both forms should include your reflection on the process and product of your culminating study.

### **Bibliography**

1. Works Cited (MLA) or References (APA)
2. Study Bibliography
3. Annotated Bibliography or Sample Annotations (if required by your advisor)

### **Format**

#### **Written Work**

The written work must utilize gender-inclusive English prose and citations and bibliography in acceptable MLA, APA or Chicago style. For particulars, see MLA or APA guidelines in the most recent edition of **Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference***. The page should have one-inch margins on all four sides. Font style and size must be approved by your advisor.

#### **a. Pagination**

Page numbers (starting with the Abstract) are in Arabic numerals and run in sequence through the last page of the final product.

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| • Title page (see text below)                   | no number |
| • Abstract (no more than one page)              | number    |
| • Table of Contents                             | number    |
| • Preface                                       | number    |
| • Body of document                              | number    |
| • Works Cited/References                        | number    |
| • Selected Annotated Bibliography (if required) | number    |
| • Study Bibliography                            | number    |
| • Appendices (if necessary)                     | number    |

**Note:** Page numbers may appear at the top or bottom, middle or right side of the page. The positioning of page numbers must be consistent throughout the document.

**b. Title Page**

The following information should be centered and spaced to fill the page:

Title of the study.

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of Bachelor of Arts at Union Institute & University

Student's name

Date

Professor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Faculty name

**Second Reader**

All final products are reviewed by a professor who did not advise the study. Ordinarily, a final draft of the document must be in the second reader's possession by 10 days to two weeks before the final submission of the document to the program. [You will be advised of the exact date during your culminating term.] The second reader's response goes directly to your professor; you will receive second reader feedback, including any recommended changes, from your professor. At the faculty meeting where completed culminating studies are presented, your professor shares the faculty transcript evaluation, and your second reader comments on the study and may have suggestions about the evaluation. After this process, your professor will share the transcript evaluation with you.

**Culminating Presentation**

At the end of the culminating term, you will make a presentation to the entire learning community based on your study. For residency options, such presentations generally are scheduled to last 50 minutes, with 10 minutes for questions and discussion.

Keep in mind the following guidelines:

- The presentation can't possibly cover everything you did and learned this semester. Be selective. Think about what is the most important learning for you and what will interest and educate your audience.

- The most important part of your presentation should be your ideas, discoveries and/or creative products, including how you arrived at your conclusions and how you supported them in your academic or creative work. Focus on teaching that content.
- Avoid extravagant technological shows that consume hours of preparation time. We are more interested in you – your mind, thoughts and feelings – and less interested in the bells and whistles of technology (which sometimes fail).
- Online students should keep in mind their personal level of technological comfort and resources. Culminating presentations can consist of appropriate written documents, such as chapters or essays from the final document, with suitable introduction and discussion material. Avoid trying out techniques that are new to you, especially at the last minute of the semester. Have a Plan B ready in case your PowerPoint slide show won't upload. (Remember, satellite connections upload very slowly. Images should be re-sized to shorten loading time.)
- Online students should be mindful of human attention spans (about 20 minutes in front of a screen). More is not necessarily better.

### **Submitting your Culminating Study Document to the Program Office in Portable Document Format (PDF)**

The B.A. program requires you to submit the final product of your culminating study as a PDF file, a format that retains all the elements of a printed document as an electronic image that can be viewed, navigated, printed, or sent to someone else. PDF files are created using Adobe Acrobat or similar programs. A PDF file can be opened in a Web browser like Internet Explorer using the free Adobe Reader software, whether one uses a Mac or Windows-based computer.

### **Finalizing and Submitting your Faculty-Approved Document to Your Professor**

- Following agreement between you and your advisor on the final version of your culminating study document (in proper format following the guidelines above), convert the document to a PDF according to the instructions provided in the section following this one.
- Once you've made the conversion, check to make sure the PDF version of your final product is what you expect it to be by sending the PDF as an attachment to your own e-mail address, opening the PDF file, and reviewing it carefully. If it is OK, go to the next step:
- Ensure that your document file is named according to the following convention: **yourlastname\_yourfirstname.pdf** E-mail your complete, PDF document as an attachment to your professor. The professor will then email this PDF document to your program advisor stating that this is the faculty-approved culminating study document.
- If there is a problem with the submission, your faculty advisor will contact you to clarify what you need to do to resolve the problem.
- Make corrections as needed and re-send to your professor.
- When your faculty-approved culminating study document has been received by the program office, you should receive a confirmation e-mail from your Program Advisor.

### **Instructions for Converting your Document to Portable Document Format (PDF) Free PDF Creator – PrimoPDF**

One way to convert your final paper document to PDF is to use PrimoPDF, free software available

on the Web. This software converts an existing electronic file to a PDF file. Information about this software is available at [www.primopdf.com](http://www.primopdf.com). Directions for how to download, install and use PrimoPDF can be found at [www.primopdf.com/free-pdf-userguide.asp](http://www.primopdf.com/free-pdf-userguide.asp).

Once you have installed the software you can convert any document (Word, Excel, etc.) to PDF by choosing the “print” command for your file and selecting the PrimoPDF “printing” option. The document will not actually print but will convert to PDF format and will allow you to choose a name for your PDF document. Within this process, you must name your file according to the following convention: **yourlastname\_yourfirstname.pdf**

Here are directions for converting to PDF with the free software download:

1. In the software program you have used to create your final product(e.g., Word) and with the final product’s file open, select **File>Print**. The **Print** dialog window appears.
2. In the **Name:** field at the top of the print window, select the **PrimoPDF** option from the list of available printers.
3. At the bottom of the print window, click **OK**. A dialog window for PDF conversion will appear.
4. Choose your **PDF Settings** by clicking on one of the radio buttons in the middle of the dialog window for PDF conversion. For your culminating study document you should choose **Screen**.
5. Near the bottom of the window, click the box to the right of the **Save As:** field.
  - a. Choose a location on your computer to save your PDF file.
  - b. In the **Save As:** field, give your file a name according to the following convention: **yourlastname\_yourfirstname** (The symbol between the names is an underscore.)
6. Click **OK** to save the document as PDF. Once you save your file as a PDF you will not be able to make changes to it unless you purchase the Adobe Acrobat software mentioned in the section following this one.

### **Full Version of Adobe Acrobat Software**

To edit PDF documents and benefit from other advanced features, you may purchase your own full version of Adobe Acrobat software. Thee following Web page compares the various features in versions of Adobe Acrobat: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/matrix.html>

### **Macintosh Users**

Macintosh computers running on version 10 operating systems have the ability to create PDF files from most of their applications. This means you can convert your text document directly from the application you are working in. Instead of using the “Save As” feature, you will have to “print” to a file by clicking on **File** from the menu bar and then **Print** from the drop down menu. Within the **Print** dialog box that appears you will find a button titled **Save as PDF**. Once you save your file as a PDF you will not be able to make changes to it unless you purchase the full version of Adobe Acrobat software noted above.

### **If you need to convert paper for inclusion in the final PDF document:**

If you have paper elements to include in the electronic version of your final product, such as photographs or drawings, you should follow one of the two options listed here.

- Have your paper professionally scanned instead of converting it to PDF yourself. Bring a complete version of your final product, including the elements not originally created in electronic form, to a copy center or office supply store for scanning to PDF format.
- Publish audio and/or visual elements of your culminating study on the Web. This can be done either on your own Web page or on an image or video hosting Web site such as Flickr or Shutterfly. If you choose this option, be sure to include the Web address for your work in an appropriate place within the final product you submit electronically to the program office. You should also be aware of the Web hosting service's policies regarding short- and long-term access to your work. Please include any relevant notices of this nature alongside the Web address in your final product.

### **Consult B.A. Program Staff**

If you encounter a problem and are not certain who can help you solve it, you may contact Lynda Howell, who is half-time IT and half-time librarian, at [Lynda.Howell@myunion.edu](mailto:Lynda.Howell@myunion.edu) or Orsolya Callnan, the Instructional Technologist, at [Orsolya.Callnan@myunion.edu](mailto:Orsolya.Callnan@myunion.edu)

## Appendix 4: Certified Learning

Note: this procedure is currently under review by a University Committee. The requirements may change during the 2012-13 year. Please consult Program Advisor to make sure that these regulations are still in force.

Certified Learning is college-level learning that is offered through workshops, seminars, certifications, or courses presented at non-regionally accredited colleges or through professional organizations. In order to receive academic credit for this type of learning, learners must present thorough documentation that demonstrates the learning has been at the college-level. Written confirmation by the originating or sponsoring institution (such as transcripts or letters of verification, etc.) must be included. A Union Institute & University faculty will evaluate for credit hour acceptance.

- Up to 30 Certified Learning credits may be awarded. These credits are included in the maximum 78 credits accepted in advanced standing in the B.A. program.
- All certified learning must be submitted by the drop/ add date of the next to last term of enrollment.
- A per-credit hour fee is charged according to the number of credits awarded through this kind of learning. [See Tuition and Fees schedule for amount.] Financial aid is not available for certified learning.

Checklist of material that is required before submission to the faculty member for evaluation:

- Transcript OR Official letter from the institution, including:
  - Course title(s)
  - Course date(s), time(s) and location(s)
  - Verification of successful completion
- Certificate
- Description of course content, including requirements and learning outcomes
- Professional qualifications of instructor(s)
- Publication describing the institution and/or Internet URL
- Number of contact hours (if applicable)
  - Classroom hours
  - Specialized
  - Practicum

This material should be submitted to student's Program Advisor who will check them for completeness and then submit them to a faculty member for evaluation.

**Appendix 5:  
EXCEL HANDBOOK**

**EXCEL\* Guidelines**

**\*Experiential College-Equivalent Learning**

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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Adults learn a great deal through the events of their lives and from personal reading. The B.A. program offers a means for some students to receive college credit if they can demonstrate the college-equivalent learning they have gained from their pre-B.A. program experience. Credit is awarded on the basis of a written essay articulating the college-level learning acquired, accompanied by documentation of the experience itself. This is called an EXCEL essay (see Section V). Most students gain a great deal from the process of looking back to review and re-evaluate what they have learned. However, this is not a slam-dunk process. Students must plan to invest significant time, thought, and writing into preparing an EXCEL essay.

Many colleges offer course work equivalency credit for prior learning. The B.A. program process is more integrative. Adults learn in a variety of ways because jobs/family/community/personal interests are all connected. We believe it is critical that students be able to reconstruct, reflect on, and analyze what they have learned. For this reason, we believe an essay format is the best way of demonstrating knowledge that is grounded in prior reading and/or experience.

Credit is awarded for identifying, describing, analyzing, and reflecting upon the college-equivalent learning that has resulted from your experiences, not for the experiences themselves. While your experiences are invaluable to your personal development, they do not, in themselves, constitute college-level, academic learning. The B.A. program may award credit only on the basis of written evidence of the knowledge and the analytical, critical, integrative, and reflective skills for which college credit would be appropriate. In short, your experience should be translatable into college courses. If it does not have a college equivalency, the experience may be of great value to you, but

we cannot give it EXCEL credit.

As an example of this, consider the experience of a faculty member: He has taught in college for over twenty years but could not get EXCEL credits for it because he never examined it in light of college study. That is, he never reflected on it from the point of view of educational theory, philosophy, pedagogy, adult development, and so on. So while the experience was rich and important to him, it does not really translate into college education credit.

Since we offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in liberal studies, your discussion of what you have learned needs to be from a liberal arts perspective; that is, it should not be too technical or specialized in approach or language, and it should include reflection on broader personal and social or cultural implications.

Because this process is primarily a writing project, students need to complete at least one successful B.A. program term before requesting permission to write the EXCEL essay. We recommend, however, that students complete two or more studies before attempting the essay. Keep in mind that two faculty recommendations are required.

The maximum number of credits that can be awarded through EXCEL is 30. This maximum includes any life experience-type credits transferred in from other schools.

The Educational Issues Committee (EIC) oversees the EXCEL process, giving students permission to write the essay and eventually making the final judgment for credit awarded. The committee meets monthly except during the summer. The Associate Dean is the student's contact for the entire process. At least two Core Faculty serve on the Committee on a rotating basis, with expert readers used as needed.

## II. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

- An Individual Meeting is held with a Program Advisor who explains the basic EXCEL process, reviews the student's progress toward meeting the B.A. program degree criteria, and discusses how EXCEL might fit into the student's trajectory. A broad time frame is discussed.
- The student asks her/his two most recent professors to comment on the student's preparedness for attempting an EXCEL essay and for acceleration toward the degree. (See Faculty Recommendation form at end of this document.)
- A Proposal is submitted by the student to the EIC, along with the professors' recommendations. The Committee considers such factors as the following in its decision to accept the proposal and permit the writing of the essay:
  - Quality of the proposal itself (see Section IV),
  - Professors' recommendations,
  - Progress toward meeting the program's degree criteria,
  - Demonstration of skills necessary to write the essay,
  - Educational record prior to entering the program,
  - Evidence that the proposed content of the essay does not overlap credits already awarded, and
  - Educational goals and evidence that acceleration is warranted.

Either permission is given to proceed with the essay or another course of action is recommended (usually that the proposal be rewritten). One opportunity to submit a revised proposal is allowed. The student will receive a written explanation of the decision, typically via e-mail.

- The EXCEL Fee (see *tuition and fees information on UI&U website*) is charged once the Committee gives authorization to a student to attempt the essay. This fee is non-refundable.
- A Draft of ten pages of the EXCEL essay may be sent to the Associate Dean for feedback from a faculty reader. Comments will be sent to the student by e-mail.
- The essay with accompanying documentation is submitted to the EIC. A credit decision is made and, if positive, specific academic areas are identified for which the credits are given. The results of the Committee's decision are communicated in writing to both the student and the college Registrar, and a statement appears on the official transcript noting the advancement. In the event that the credit requested is not awarded, the decision may be appealed.

### **III. SOME THOUGHTS ON COLLEGE-EQUIVALENT EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**

#### **WHAT IT IS (AND IS NOT)**

All adults accumulate experience, but not every adult acquires college-level learning from that experience. The B.A. program accredits learning, not experience, so the distinction between the two is crucial. While there are many varieties of learning, college-level experiential learning is distinguished by its combining theoretical understanding and critical evaluation with knowledge derived from practical experience.

College-equivalent experiential learning has several characteristics:

- It results from a conscious pursuit of knowledge and understanding within the context of your lived experience. Sources for this knowledge and understanding can come from texts, workshops, training programs, employment, mentors, a practicum, or any other informative engagement with life.
- It combines theoretical perspective with practical application. No body of knowledge is merely a chain of facts or data. For something to be known, there must be a theory of how data interact in some comprehensible way and a comprehension of these interactions at some level of abstraction beyond the simple description of what was seen or done. Knowledge of the theories and their contexts (e.g., historical, social, political) that relate to the learning you derived from your experience is essential for it to be considered college-level learning.

An example: let's say you ran a small business for five years and were successful at it, but you never studied marketing, economics, business theory beyond the framework of your store. You might have had a valuable experience running a business but would be hard pressed to turn into college-equivalent learning given the absence of the larger theoretical picture.

- It is seen through a critical lens. Beyond mere data and beyond even the application of theory to the data, college-equivalent learning gives evidence of an underlying questioning or skepticism. This questioning attitude compels the student to analyze and critique her/his experience and the conclusions s/he has drawn from it and hold these conclusions up for judgment. Because of this, the demonstration of your learning cannot be a simple recitation

of your beliefs; it must include challenges to your points of view and your sound reasons for maintaining your position in spite of these challenges.

- It is presented in a manner that is appropriate for advancement toward a bachelor's degree. This means that your EXCEL essay must demonstrate good writing and organizational skills, the proper use of references, and the ability to balance and integrate original thinking with information derived from your experience.

#### **IV. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROPOSAL**

**Finding a Focus:** In the proposal you give a brief summary of the experience(s) from which you will draw your college-level learning. You then present a clear focus for your writing and provide a detailed outline of the content of your essay. There is a variety of methods you can use to help you reflect on the focus of your essay. Most students find they need to do something systematic to discover major themes for their writing. You may find the exercises in either Option 1 or Option 2 below helpful in determining a focus for your EXCEL process.

**Option 1:** To help you determine what areas of your previous experience could be the most productive for writing an EXCEL essay, the following is a possible guideline:

1. On a sheet of paper, draw a time-line from the time you finished high school until you started the B.A. program.
  - Starting on the left, map out your employment history from your first job to the present,
  - Next, add in all non-employment experience that involved significant learning (i.e., childrearing, hobbies, travel, workshops, political activities, reading, research, etc.),
2. Reflect on each of these experiences on your time-line and determine:
  - What skills and knowledge you developed as a result of the experience,
  - What academic areas these learning experiences are related to,
  - What documentation either from works, produced or acknowledgment from others in the field you generated from the experience,
  - How this experience relates to the B.A. program degree criteria.
3. Place the answers to these questions in blocks underneath the time-line. Those areas that contain elements of each of the above are the ones that may be the most productive for writing the EXCEL essay.
4. What about the experiences you uncovered in steps 1-3 helped you place it in the broader context of that time and place (i.e., childrearing: understanding of how childhood is different or similar at different times and places, or underlying theories of child development)?
5. Choose one or two major themes to focus on for your EXCEL essay.

**Option 2:** Here is an outline to follow to help you determine what themes in your life could be the most productive as the focus of your EXCEL essay:

1. On a sheet of paper, write across the top the broad categories of things you think you know a lot about. (Save some room for things you may think of later or themes that emerge as you go.)
2. Under each heading, list the following:
  - All the activities that contributed to your knowledge in that area: paid work, unpaid work, life activities.
  - Books or other reading, research, discussions with experts, etc. you've done in the area.
  - The academic areas that your knowledge in each area seems to fit into.

3. Look over your listings and mark and eliminate activities and areas for which you have already received academic credit.
4. What about the experiences you uncovered in steps 1-3 helped you place it in the broader context of that time and place (i.e., childrearing: understanding of how childhood is different or similar at different times and places, or underlying theories of child development)?
5. Choose one or two major themes to focus on for your EXCEL essay.

See if any of your themes fit together into something more comprehensive or if any are closely interrelated. The themes that have the most entries in every category are the ones that may be the most productive for writing the EXCEL essay. An example of this process follows on the next page.

Elements of the Proposal: The Proposal (three to five pages is usually sufficient) is a sketch of the essay you wish to write and includes the following elements:

- A brief resume (an autobiographical chronology) of those experiences between your high school graduation and your enrollment in the B.A. program that are directly relevant to the credit you are seeking, including dates and depth of involvement (e.g., part-time, full-time). These experiences should relate directly to and substantiate your background in areas to be addressed in the essay.
- A brief statement of your educational goals or objectives within the B.A. program and/or after graduation.
- A review of degree criteria already met, those that will be met by the essay if all credit is granted, and those that will remain to be met in succeeding terms.
- A statement requesting a specific number of credits (including the subject areas in which you propose to receive them) and indicating how many terms will still be needed to graduate if all credits requested are awarded.
- A well-developed description of the essay in as much detail as possible, beginning with an expanded statement concerning its focus and including a multi-level outline to indicate the major sections and subsections of the essay. It can be very useful to arrange your outline according to degree criteria or academic disciplines for which each section of the essay will demonstrate college-level learning. For example, if in the essay or a section of it you seek credit in acting and directing, the outline should state this and then indicate the break-down of learning components in the field of acting and directing for which you are seeking credit. Demonstrating a clear focus for the writing and developing a detailed outline or narrative description are the difficult but essential tasks involved in producing the Proposal.
- A bibliography or list of resources you plan to include if relevant. [Note that these bibliographic items must not be new but should have been read prior to enrollment in the BA program.]

## **V. A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ESSAY**

Finding a Focus: The EXCEL essay – that is, the college-level learning it demonstrates – is what you’re really getting credit for. Answering the following questions may assist you in developing your essay and help assure that you will not miss any necessary component of the college-level learning that your essay must demonstrate. It is also a good checklist when asking yourself whether a given set of experiences might contain the elements that must be demonstrated in an EXCEL essay for which credit can be awarded. To begin this exercise, take

out several sheets of paper and at the top of each sheet, write one of the following questions. Then use the rest of the sheet, and as many other sheets as necessary, to answer each question.

- Why did I become interested in or why was I required to acquire this knowledge?
- How did I initiate the learning process or how was it initiated for me?
- What practical learning did I acquire and how did I know that I had acquired it?
- What resources did I use to broaden my learning and to gain an understanding of the theories behind my practical learning?
- What theoretical understandings, themes, and principles emerged from my attempts to broaden the knowledge I gained through my practical experience?
- How did I try to analyze and validate my experience to help assure that my conclusions were not erroneous or idiosyncratic?
- What theoretical and practical challenges confronted the conclusions I was drawing and how did I decide to continue believing in my own conclusions or to alter them based on new and more compelling evidence?
- How and why did my experiential learning affect my subsequent thinking and behavior?
- How do I view the situation I am writing about before my experiential learning and how do I view it differently today and why?
- Why do I find my new learning valuable?

#### Elements of the essay:

- Cover Sheet. A page with your name, the title of the essay, a paragraph stating what experiences you are drawing from (with specific dates), the number of credits you are seeking, and the academic fields or disciplines in which you are attempting to receive credit,
- Table of Contents. A page or so reflecting the outline you submitted with your Proposal as modified by actual writing of the essay and its final organization
- Narrative, reflective, analytical essay. The primary documentation of college-level learning is the EXCEL essay. This essay documents the steps you became interested in or were required to acquire this knowledge, how you initiated the learning process, what you learned and how you knew that you had learned it, what theoretical understandings emerged from the activities you engaged in, what theoretical and practical challenges confronted the conclusions you were drawing, how and why your learning changed your subsequent thinking and behavior are among the issues your EXCEL essay should address. Essays vary in length up to 80 pages. **THE MOST COMMON MISTAKE STUDENTS MAKE IS TO DESCRIBE EVENTS AND THEN MERELY ASSERT THAT THEY HAVE LEARNED THIS OR THAT FROM THOSE EVENTS WITHOUT EXPLICATING, DEVELOPING, AND REFLECTING UPON WHAT WAS ACTUALLY LEARNED.**
- Bibliography and a list of resources drawn upon for the essay. For experiential learning to be college-equivalent, it must reach beyond the resources of the self and call upon the experience and theoretical understanding of others. (For example, when an artistic work is central to the credit requested by the petitioner, the essay would need to demonstrate the petitioner's skill in critical interpretation based upon a knowledge of aesthetic theory.) A bibliography or a list of resources shows to whom and to what you turned to enrich and deepen the understanding you acquired from your experience. Here, you would list the sources of the theoretical understanding you gained, such as books, articles, manuals, and other written sources; mentorship's, workshops, interviews, formal and informal apprenticeships, and other personal contacts; indeed, any recognizable medium for the transmission of theoretical understanding and of experience beyond your own.

- Expert testimony. Your documentation may include letters from people who know both you and who can attest to the fact and quality of your learning.
- Objects produced. Documentation often includes samples or work produced. A person seeking assessment of prior learning in sculpture would include photographs or slides of the sculptures made; someone seeking credit in music would include tapes of work done. Note again, however, that the objects alone are not sufficient to establish that you gained college-level learning from your efforts. This is not meant to discredit those objects or to devalue your skill and effort in producing them. Learning is a process as well as a result. While results—objects produced or changes made in the self and the world—are a significant part of the educational process, they cannot be viewed in isolation from it. For this reason, they may serve only to support the evidence of learning whose full demonstration must be the central focus of the essay.

## VI. FEES

Non-refundable fee (see *tuition and fees information on UI&U website*) is charged once the Proposal is approved, regardless of the number of credits attempted or granted.

## VII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- Does the essay have to be about things learned on the job? No. If you have had a great interest in something, that interest could be the focus of your essay. By great interest, we mean something you've thought about, read about, experienced deeply, etc.
- How much credit can I get for my experience? None! Credit is not awarded for having had the experiences or for asserting that you have learned a lot from them. It's not a question of whether you have had a wealth of experience or acquired increasingly responsible positions because of your experiences, etc. Credit is based solely on how well you identify, demonstrate, analyze, and reflect upon the college-level learning you acquired from those experiences. This is the reason why the essay is the essence of the whole process.
- What is the difference between an essay for one semester (1-12 credits) and an essay for two semesters (13-30 credits)? The differences come down to issues like 1) the range and depth of your learning as reflected in the essay, 2) the thought that goes into the reflection and analysis in the essay and the manner in which you express it, 3) your ability to relate seemingly different experiences and identify common themes or make new connections, 4) the amount of reading you've done in the area, 5) the extent of your familiarity with theories and your ability to locate your personal understanding within the larger context of these theories.
- Is it possible to get only partial credit or even no credit at all? Yes. It is possible that you would get fewer credits than you petitioned for or possible that you would receive no credit at all. However, the odds and past experience are in your favor for at least some credit.
- How long does it take to write the essay? It typically takes about six months between submitting the Proposal and completing the essay. The process cannot begin until you have completed one term in the program. You may take a leave of absence to write the essay. Some students work on the EXCEL essay at the same time they are engaged in study in the program.
- From what periods of time may I draw experiences for use in the essay? You may draw from any experiences you've had after graduating from high school and before enrolling in the

B.A. program. However, the subject areas in which you hope to receive credit may not overlap areas you've studied in the program or for which you've received transfer credit. For example, if you've worked for several years as a substance abuse counselor, and your first program study focused on treatment techniques for substance abuse, your essay would need to focus on something else, or you would have to assure the Committee that the focus of your essay in no way overlapped any area covered in your study.

- Are the essays confidential? The essay is read by members of the EIC. It is not available to anyone else (other than faculty or staff) without your permission. As part of your academic record, it is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Some particularly good essays are shared as examples, with prior permission of the author.

Note: These guidelines derived some of their inspiration from the handbook of the University Without Walls at the University of Massachusetts and by Goddard College's document for assessment of prior learning.

Rev. 3/89, 8/93, 5/95, 6/09

## VIII. FORMS AND EXAMPLES

### UI&U B.A. Program

#### EXPERIENTIAL COLLEGE EQUIVALENT LEARNING (EXCEL)essay FACULTY RECOMMENDATION FORM

Student:            Option:    Faculty:

Number of credits requested:    Proposed subject areas of essay:

Brief description of proposed essay:

Students can earn up to 30 EXCEL credits by writing a reflective, critical essay which demonstrates that the student gained college equivalent learning through her/his experiences. Professor's recommendations play a key role in the EXCEL approval process. The most essential question for faculty to consider in completing this recommendation is, "Is there any academic reason why this student should not graduate one or two semesters sooner that she/he is scheduled to now?" Your recommendation should focus solely on your assessment of the student's ability to complete a 40-90 page EXCEL essay. The student must possess strong writing and critical thinking skills, the ability to work independently, and the ability to place her/his experiences in an academic context. That the student "deserves" credit, or has had worthwhile life experiences, or needs to graduate sooner for financial or other reasons, should not be factors in making an EXCEL recommendation. An EXCEL essay requires the same level of skill as a strong culminating study, but it is an independent process, without faculty mentoring. If you have any concerns about this student's ability to write a substantial, well-organized, analytical and reflective essay, please state them below.

1. Are this student's writing skills fluent and literate?
2. Does this student organize material well?
3. Could this student undertake a culminating study right now?
4. Do you recommend that this student be approved to undertake an EXCEL project at this time?

Faculty signature:                      Date:

Education Chair signature (for teacher licensure students only)

***Please return this form to: UI&U B.A. Program, 62 Ridge St. Suite 2, Montpelier, VT 05602.***