BACHELOR OF INDEPENDENT STUDIES (BIS)

New applicants are not currently being accepted. The Bachelor of Independent Studies (BIS) Program is the State University System External Degree Program. The universities currently involved are Florida International University, Florida State University, the University of Florida, the University of North Florida, and the University of South Florida. The administrative office for the statewide program is located at USF in Tampa.

Founded in 1968, the external degree program is for adults who find it difficult to attend regular university classes because of career or family commitments. The BIS student proceeds at his/her own pace and, for the most part, in his/her own setting. The exception is the summer seminars, which require periodic, short-term campus residence.

Admission Procedures

Applicants must qualify for admission to the University of South Florida and for admission to the B.I.S. Program. The USF Director of Admissions rules on the admission of an applicant to the university. The BIS Committee rules on admission of an applicant to the BIS Program. BIS applicants typically welcome the challenge of liberal studies and the rigor of independent study. BIS students pay regular USF tuition for undergraduate students.

Mechanisms for Recognizing Prior Learning

Individuals with an A.A. degree from a State of Florida community or junior college, and Registered Dental Hygienists, Registered Nuclear Medicine Technologists, Registered Nurses, Registered Radiologic Technologists, and Registered Respiratory Therapists with an A.S. degree from a state-approved program qualify for a "two-plus-two interface" with BIS requirements. In other words, those with an appropriate associate's degree complete two substantive study areas involving two tutorials and two seminars. The two study areas (Social Sciences & Natural Sciences or Humanities & Social Sciences or Natural Sciences & Humanities) are stipulated by the BIS Committee. The BIS Committee normally picks the two areas in which a student has the least background.

The Program is academically responsible to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The BIS Committee is advisory to the Provost.

For further information, contact the State University System, External Degree Program, Bachelor of Independent Studies (BIS) located at HMS 443, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620-8400. Telephone: 813-974-4058. E-mail: bis@luna.cas.usf.edu

Recommended Prerequisites (State Mandated Common Prerequisites)

Students wishing to transfer to USF should complete the A.A. degree at the community college. Some courses required for the major may also meet General Education Requirements thereby transferring maximum hours to the university. If students transfer fewer than 60 semester hours of acceptable credit, the students must meet the university's entering freshman requirements including ACT or SAT test scores, GPA, and course requirements. There are no State Mandated Common Prerequisites for this degree program.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum consists of four study areas: the Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and an Inter-area Study. The first three areas of study are completed through a tutorial and a resident seminar. While the seminar is of short duration, the tutorial for each area requires a longer commitment of time. The student may begin in any of the first three study areas and is encouraged to start in his/her area of strength.

TUTORIALS

The tutorial or guided independent study is predominantly print intensive, with core and suggested readings drawn from the BIS Guide to Independent Studies. In the Humanities tutorial, for example, the student reads across the disciplines of the Humanities Study Area which include Language, Literature, Philosophy, Art, Drama, and Architecture. Selected works are reviewed within the framework of historical periods. The objectives involve general knowledge of the basic principles of each of the genres and periods, the ability to visualize relationships between the disciplines, grasp of the nomenclature of the disciplines, and the capacity to apply basic concepts to current issues. The student is responsible for systematic interaction with the faculty mentor who directs the reading process and evaluates the student's progress.

In the Natural Sciences tutorial, the BIS learner studies Science -- Science for the non-scientist. Emphasis is placed on the interrelationships of the disciplines of Science. Topics illustrative of this interdisciplinary approach to Sciences include Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Astronomy, Geology, Ecology, History, and Philosophy of Science, and the impact of Science on Technology. As is the case with other tutorials the learning objectives involve concepts, nomenclature, cross-disciplinary insights, and application of concepts/methods to current issues.

In the Social Sciences tutorial, the student reads selected core and supplementary reading and completes written projects in each of the basic disciplines of the Social Science Study Area. These include Anthropology, Economics, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, Women's Studies, and Sociology. Tutorial objectives include knowledge of the basic concepts and principles of each discipline, familiarity with major social science research techniques, understanding of the relationships among the different disciplines, and the ability to apply disciplinary or interdisciplinary concepts or models to current issues.

Following each tutorial, the student completes a comprehensive examination in order to demonstrate that a satisfactory level of proficiency has been attained in the independent study component of a particular area. The exam may be taken on or off campus. A research paper is also undertaken in each of the tutorials. It is normally done at the end of a tutorial.

SEMINARS

Students are required to attend two-week long seminars on the USF campus. Each seminar (for each of the first three study areas: Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences) represents a period of intensive residential learning under the direction of a team of faculty members. Seminar faculty teams identify the subject matter and activities of each seminar. Humanities seminars, for example, are often theme-oriented but the focus is on interdisciplinary concerns. A number of historical periods may be approached through discussion of art, music, literature, and architecture. In a Natural Sciences seminar, the focus is on an interdisciplinary approach to learning about Science. Social Sciences seminar faculty focus on the knowledge gained in the tutorial with an emphasis on synthesis, extension, and application of this learning to selected topics such as energy, patterns of human behavior, and human rights.

Seminar activities also vary with the study area. A visit to a museum or art gallery is a usual component of a Humanities Seminar. In Science, laboratory experiences and field trips are utilized to introduce students to the field of Science and to allow them to experience the excitement of discovery. Many of the activities described in a Social Sciences seminar syllabus are used in other seminars as well, i.e., lectures by faculty team members or guest lecturers, presentations by group members, group discussion, library research, learning journals, and a research paper.
Students in all seminars may be asked to read materials related to the seminar theme prior to the seminar and to complete written assignments after the completion of the two-week seminar period. Seminars meet for two consecutive six-day weeks and activities take up a full day. Further study and assignments occupy the evening hours.

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

The fourth study area or Inter-area Study calls for a synthesis of the first three study areas via the preparation and defense of an undergraduate thesis. The student begins the Area with Inter-area reading leading to the completion of an undergraduate thesis prospectus under the direction of a primary advisor. Following approval of the prospectus by a committee composed of three faculty, the student writes the study under the direction of the committee chairperson. The final step is to complete successfully an oral examination on the thesis.