

Guide to  
Development of an  
**Academic Plan**  
for the  
**Bachelor of Individualized Studies (BIS)**



**Bachelor of Individualized Studies**

**Be seen. Be heard. Be you.**

# Guide to the Academic Plan

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## Introduction

This guide is designed to assist you in the development and submission of an Academic Plan for the Bachelor of Individualized Studies degree program. The sections that follow provide information that will be helpful as you complete the various forms that make up a plan. Hopefully this guide will answer questions you have as you work on the forms, but if you have questions that this guide does not address, please ask for help. If you are working on your Academic Plan as part of the IDS 240 course, you can certainly direct questions to your instructor. The director of Interdisciplinary Studies can also answer your questions.

### Before You Get Started

While this guide is useful for completing the Academic Plan form, there are some things that should be done before you start filling out the forms—really, some questions that should be answered to determine if the BIS program is right for you. After considering these questions yourself, you should meet with the director of Interdisciplinary Studies to discuss your idea and determine whether the BIS program is a good fit.

**What are you wanting to prepare yourself to do? What type of career or employment?**

**What type of graduate school program?** — Basically, what is the goal you are trying to accomplish? Your goal(s) are usually tied to career aspirations (perhaps going through a professional graduate school program first). While it is possible that the Academic Plan you want to propose is simply based on your interests, it is easier to justify when tied to a career goal.

**What degree programs have you considered (here at MiSU or elsewhere)? Why would they not work for you?** — One important consideration is whether an existing program (major/minor) would meet your needs. To be approved, your Academic Plan must clearly describe why your goals cannot be met through existing MiSU programs.

**What kinds of coursework (disciplines) do you want to combine? Have you done some research on the coursework/disciplines that would be best for meeting your goals? Have you spoken with anyone in those disciplines at MiSU regarding which courses would be best for you?** — These questions are related to those above. In addition to understanding which existing degree program(s) do not meet your needs, you should know which two or three disciplines (and eventually the specific courses) you want to combine—and why. You should be able to provide some rationale for the combination. This might be research you have done on graduate school admissions guidelines, career preparation information provided by a professional society, or perhaps a degree program at another university that combines certain disciplines.

### Using This Guide and the Academic Plan Form

If the BIS program is right for you, work through this guide as you develop your Academic Plan. You will most likely be doing this as part of IDS 240, and there will be people who can help you — the IDS 240 instructor, the director of Interdisciplinary Studies, and various faculty members (hopefully those that will be willing to serve as your advisors).

Before you start filling in the electronic forms, you will probably find it helpful to print blank copies of the forms. Fill them in (in pencil) as you piece together your plan, and make changes as needed as you complete more research or discuss things with faculty members. When you are more certain of your plan, then you can transfer the information to the electronic forms.

## Academic Plan Overview

The Academic Plan is what BIS students prepare to seek approval of their degree program. The complete document consists of the following components, in this order:

- Cover Sheet
- Discipline Courses (two or more)
- General Education Courses
- Program Implementation (optional)
- Student Narrative
- Advisor Recommendation forms
- Petition for Exception (if necessary)

The Academic Plan will typically be prepared during IDS 240 Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies. Once the necessary forms are completed, the director of Interdisciplinary Studies, in cooperation with the IDS 240 instructor (if different), will assemble them into one document. The director will then attach an Academic Plan Checklist that summarizes whether the plan meets the BIS program requirements and restrictions, and provides an overall assessment of the plan. The complete packet will then be forwarded to members of the Interdisciplinary Studies Advisory Council for approval or recommendations.

## Cover Sheet

After filling in your name and your MiSU student ID number, there are six basic pieces of information to fill in. The first two indicate where you are in terms of credits completed and in-progress. The next two indicate the number of credits that remain to be taken. The first is the number of credits remaining in the program of study you are proposing. The second is the number of credits remaining in order to complete all of the General Education requirements—only include credits that are not part of the program of study

One thing to note about the number of credits remaining is that you must have at least 30 credits to complete after the current term during which you are submitting this form for consideration. This requirement reflects the fact that the BIS program is intended to consist of “intentional” academic plans, put together with some forethought. It is not intended to be solely a combination of coursework you have already taken; the Bachelor of General Studies is a more appropriate choice for such situations.

The last two items indicate when you plan to finish your degree (your last term), and the number of semesters remaining after the current term. If your coursework will involve one or more summer sessions, indicate that as well. Some example responses to this last item are: “3 sem”, “2 sem + sum”, and “3 sem + 2 sum.”

## Academic Plan Summary

### *Name of Major Proposed*

Here you should give a name to your program of study. Name it what you think it should be named if it was a regular major offered at MiSU. Try to use a name that is as descriptive as possible, but is also fairly short. The name of your proposed program is definitely something to discuss with your advisors.

### **Brief Description of Program of Study**

In this box you will describe your program of study in two sentences. The first sentence should describe the essence of your program by stating the disciplines you are combining. For example... My proposed program is a combination of Biology and Criminal Justice. The second sentence should convey what your program is going to prepare you to do. For example... The program of study is designed to prepare me for a career as a Game and Fish game warden.

### **Advisors**

You should identify two or more faculty members who are willing to serve as your discipline advisors. The number depends on how many disciplines your program combines. While you may consider one to be your “primary” advisor, you should interact regularly with all of your advisors as you work on your degree.

## **Academic Plan Courses**

A separate form is used for each of the disciplines that are part of your program of study. An image of the form with some annotations is shown on the next page. On each form (for each discipline), first fill in your name and the name of the discipline. The name of the discipline will often be obvious from the course prefix, but in cases in which you use a hybrid discipline that includes multiple course prefixes, you should give it a name. For example, “Pre-Medicine” would be a combination of courses from multiple disciplines, but together they could be considered to make up a single “discipline.”

There are two sections in which to include courses. The upper section is used for courses that you know you definitely want to include in your program of study. The bottom section can be used for possible elective courses or alternative courses. Elective courses are related courses you might take if circumstances allow, but aren’t critical to your program of study. The lower section can also include courses that can be used as an alternative to something in the upper section if circumstances prevent you from taking a course.

## **General Education Requirements**

The General Education form is used to document what you have already completed toward the General Education requirements, and what you intend to take to complete them. The courses in the Required Core and Foundational Content should not be included as part of your Academic Plan courses, but courses in your Academic Plan can be used to meet any of the Developmental Content. If there are some requirements for which you are not certain which course you will take, that’s fine; fill out as much of it as you can.

## **Program Implementation**

The Program Implementation part of the Academic Plan form is optional, but it is a good idea to complete it, even if only partially. While investigating the courses you put into your program of study, you should (when possible) record what you find out about when they will be offered. Mapping out courses for future terms could help you recognize and hopefully avoid problems such as too many courses in one term—you would have a chance to work out an alternative approach. Even if you do not turn in this section, use it to document what you know about future terms, for your own “self-advising” purposes.

basic course info:  
discipline prefix and course number,  
course title, number of credits

Student Name:	
Discipline:	

indicate whether the course is already  
completed (**comp**), in progress (**i.p.**),  
or not yet taken (**leave blank**)

enter prefix and course number  
of any pre- or co-requisite course(s)

Courses you definitely want to include:

Course	Title	Cr	Status	Pre-/Co-requisite(s)

For courses listed above:

Total Credits:	
Upper-level Credits:	
Credits Remaining:	

Total credits of all courses listed in the upper section  
Number of credits of 300- and 400-level courses  
Number of credits that have not yet been completed  
or in progress (i.e., number of credits that remain  
after the current term is completed—any courses  
without “comp” or “i.p.” in the Status column)

Possible elective or alternative courses:

Course	Title	Cr	Status	Pre-/Co-requisite(s)

Here you may list courses that could be  
taken as an elective, or courses that could  
serve as a substitute should it happen that a  
course from the upper section be unavailable.

## Program Implementation

The Program Implementation part of the Academic Plan form is optional—you do not have to complete it. However, it is a good idea to complete it, even if only partially. While investigating the courses you put into your program of study, you should (when possible) record what you find out about the frequency of offering, or specific terms the courses will be offered. Faculty in the relevant program can provide this kind of information. Mapping out courses for future terms could help you recognize and hopefully avoid problems during particular terms. For example, if this information shows a particular semester would involve taking too many credits, you would have a chance to work out ahead of time an alternative approach. Even if you do not turn in this section because you feel it is not complete enough, use it to document what you know about future terms, for your own “self-advising” purposes.

## Narrative

The Narrative is an essay that is included in your Academic Plan. This essay should provide:

- a description of your career goals,
- a description of your proposed program of study,
- a rationale for your program,
- a description of the background research on which your program is based,
- and a justification for your program.

## Career Goals

Describe the career goals that your program of study prepares you to pursue. If your career path is a multi-step path, you should state your ultimate career goal(s), but then also describe any intermediate steps. These intermediate steps might involve a graduate school or professional school program (or perhaps more than one).

## Program Description

Describe your program of study in terms of the disciplines that you are combining. In many cases, a particular discipline is easily understood, and will involve courses with a particular prefix. However, it is possible to propose a “discipline” that is actually a combination of courses from more than one “traditional” discipline. For example, imagine that you want to combine some history courses and political science courses that focus on American history and politics, but there are not enough credits (15 minimum) of either HIST or POLS courses. You could conceive a combination of HIST and POLS courses as an “American Studies” discipline. Likewise, “Pre-Medicine” could be considered a discipline (primarily a combination of BIOL and CHEM courses).

If you are going to focus on a particular sub-discipline with a discipline, you should state that focus. For example, if psychology is one of your disciplines, but you are focusing on child and adolescent psychology, you should make that clear.

## Rationale

### *Discipline Connections*

In presenting a rationale, you should describe the connections between the disciplines you are using in your program of study. Describe how they work together to help you address your career goals. What role or roles does each discipline play toward achieving your goals? In some cases, this will involve describing how the chosen disciplines contribute to your career. If your career path involves graduate or professional school as a next step, you will probably focus more on how the disciplines work together to prepare you for that next step.

### *Background Research*

The Background Research section is your description of the research you did that provided the information you used to put together your program of study. Faculty in relevant programs at MiSU can be a valuable source of information, but there are several types of outside sources of information you can use. Some types of sources are listed below. For any of these, or perhaps other sources you use, you should describe what you learned, and how that is reflected either generally or specifically in the program of study you are proposing.

- **Other Schools:** You should search to find out whether there are any schools that offer the type of major you propose. If so, you could list the school(s) and program name(s), and provide some description of a program that is most like the program you want to complete. If you could not find any programs like the one you are proposing, you should mention that.
- **Graduate or Professional School Programs:** If your next step is to attend a graduate school or professional school program, the entrance requirements for appropriate program(s) can be a source of information for building an appropriate program of study. If this is relevant to you, for a graduate/professional school program that seems best for your career goals, you should describe what kind of background the program requires (or perhaps prefers) for admittance.
- **Professional Organizations:** Many careers align with one or more professional organizations (societies or associations). These professional organizations can be very good sources of information on the backgrounds needed to pursue a particular career. If you find such sources of information, you should describe the recommendations you found.
- **Working Professional:** Someone who is working (or perhaps at some time did work) in the career that you want to pursue can be a very good source of advice. If you get advice from someone(s), describe what you learned from them. Have you received advice from someone who works in or is knowledgeable about the career you want to pursue?

## Justification

You should present a justification for your BIS program. Why is the BIS degree program best for you? Why can't you meet your career goals be met through an existing academic program or combination of programs (majors, minors, concentrations)? Perhaps a better way to state this is... Why can't you meet your career goals be met through a reasonable combination of existing academic programs? Because you are building a program of study using existing courses, it is possible to get those courses through pursuit of existing programs. However, pursuit of those programs may require you to complete an unreasonable number of programs and/or



unreasonable number of credits, in part because they may require you to complete courses that are not relevant to your interests or needs. Practical consideration can certainly be a centerpiece of your justification.

Your justification can and perhaps should include details on what you would have to complete (which programs, how many credits) to end up with a transcript that documents the kind of combination that you want to pursue. This would give you a basis for documenting the number of courses (or credits) that you would be required to complete that are not germane to your interests.

## **Petition for Exception**

The Petition for Exception form is used to seek approval of some aspect of an Academic Plan that does not meet one or more of the BIS program requirements outlined in the next section. The most common reason for seeking an exception is being a little short in terms of the necessary upper-level credits. Another reason might be including a discipline with fewer than the required credits. Exceptions are likely to be approved as long as they are justified—as long as they strengthen the plan.

## **BIS Program Requirements and Restrictions**

The BIS program requirements and restrictions should be kept in mind when developing your academic plan. With valid justification, it is possible to deviate from these requirements. If necessary, work with the director of Interdisciplinary Studies to investigate such exceptions and to develop a Petition for Exception form that would accompany your Academic Plan submission.

- Student program should consist of the Individualized Studies Core (6 cr min) and at least 56 credits in an Academic Plan drawn largely from two or three disciplines (focus areas)
  - should include at least 22 cr each from two disciplines or 15 cr each from three disciplines (exceptions to this are possible if thoroughly justified in the proposal)
- Student's proposal must explain in detail why their goals cannot be met through existing MSU programs – proposed plans that are very close to meeting existing major/minor requirements will not be approved.
- Necessary prerequisite courses must be included in the program or among student's General Education courses (or student must obtain a written waiver).
- BIS Academic Plan must include at least 36 upper-level (300- and 400-level) credits excluding IDS 360 and IDS 480.
- BIS Academic Plan may not include courses used to meet the General Education Required Core or Foundational Content requirements.
- BIS Academic Plan may include courses used to meet the General Education Developmental Content requirements.
- Students earning the BIS degree may not earn another degree/major, minor, or concentration that overlap(s) with coursework in their BIS Academic Plan.
- At least 30 credits should be coursework not yet completed (after term in which proposal is approved).

## Completing the Academic Plan

There are up to five different forms that should be completed. Each one is available as a Microsoft Word file. The five files are:

CoverSheet(blank).docx  
Discipline-X-Courses(blank).docx  
GenEdCourses(blank).docx  
Implementation(blank).docx  
NarrativeTemplate(blank).docx

One additional form may also be needed, if there is a need to request an exception to one or more of the BIS program requirements.

PetitionForException(blank).docx

Here are some specific instructions for these files.

- After you have completed each form, you should SAVE AS the file, replacing the “blank” in the filename with your last name.
- The Discipline-X-Courses(blank).docx form will have to be completed and saved more than once—one time for each discipline. For this form, also replace the “X” in the filename with a number (1, 2, etc.), using a different number for each discipline.
- The NarrativeTemplate(blank).docx document is used to type your narrative. In its “blank” form, the document consists of headings that should be used to organize your content. You may be given more specific instructions regarding format, such as whether to use single or double spacing. Generally, if submitting a draft for comments, it would be better to use double spacing.

The individual forms should be submitted electronically as email attachments. Your IDS 240 instructor or I.S. director will convert them into a single pdf document.