

Faculty Senate Task Force on LIBA
Final Report
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In 2018, Stockton University's Faculty Senate created a Task Force to study the institutional Bachelor of Arts: Liberal Studies degree (also known as LIBA). The charge to the committee asked it to:

- Research the history and background of the degree at Stockton
- Review the "Proposed Enhancements to the LIBA," compiled in May 2012
- Examine the current use of school-based LIBAs (including structure, number of students enrolled, and potential impact on other degree programs)
- Confirm whether the LIBA degree conformed with Middle States accreditation standards¹
- Prepare a proposal of recommendations for Faculty Senate consideration

Historical Background

The Task Force reviewed documents related to the LIBA dated from 1970 to the present to track the evolution of its structure and purpose. Each major document is briefly summarized below, including the year it was produced and relevant findings for the LIBA degree. The majority of these are program self-studies, conducted every five to six years, which make it possible to track ideas and questions about the degree as they evolve over time.

- **1970 – Academic Paper VII- General and Liberal Studies** – Authors encourage students' self-guided study based on their own interests. A Liberal Studies degree is described that offers students a way to "design his own major program" (p.14). The role of faculty and preceptors is emphasized to serve as a guide in the design and completion of the degree.
- **1976–1977 & 1977–1978 – Liberal BA Program Guides** – The LIBA is described as an option to permit students to design a complete 128-credit-hour, interdisciplinary program suited to his/her own needs and plans. Organization of the degree takes several forms, including goal-oriented, career-oriented, thematic/topical, area/cultural, and special area designs.
- **1983–1984 & 1984–1985 – Liberal Studies in the Office of General Studies Program Guide** – The LIBA's purpose remains committed to an interdisciplinary, student-designed structure. Organization of the LIBA has been reduced from previous documents to list only goal-oriented, career-oriented and thematic/topical as options for the structure of the degree.
- **1985 – Liberal Studies BA Program Self Study**- The LIBA is described as in previous documents, providing students with the freedom to design their own degree so long as it maintains sufficient breadth, depth and coherence. The organization of the LIBA continues to be the same areas noted above. Students must select a cohesive selection of courses that

¹ The Taskforce determined Middle States standards had no impact on the LIBA degree.

meet a specified area of interest. Warnings are given that the degree is not designed to dilute the depth and rigor of a traditional BA degree (thus it is not an “escape route” from a degree that may have strong performance requirements.) Within the discussion of programs (pp. 2-4), taxonomy of the LIBA is discussed. The career-orientated category is examined as it relates to the intent of the LIBA. Paths pursued by students have included library science and teaching. In such cases, the degree is still perceived as “well-constructed” with a balance of interdisciplinary study and liberal arts (p. 4).

- **1985 – Liberal Studies BA Program Self Study Consultant Report-** The consultant describes the LIBA program as beneficial to the institution and as providing an “economical means for expanding the student’s range of educational opportunities,” as well as a “testing ground for new institutional initiatives” (p. 1). The report did note that there had been a trend towards “career-oriented” LIBA degrees (p. 2), and the consultant emphasized the importance of careful design and monitoring of students pursuing these degrees to “ensure proper breadth and consistency with General Studies Program ideals” (p. 6).
- **1990 – Liberal Studies Program Self-Study** – The intent of the LIBA as a degree program remains consistent with the 1985 self-study document. Additionally, warnings are repeated from previous documents, including the misconception that a LIBA is a scattered collection of courses versus a carefully designed structure and not a shortcut to avoid course requirements in other bachelor’s degree paths. Noted within pp. 2–3 is a section related to teacher education. Due to state regulation changes, students seeking certification had to pursue a degree. Since there was no major in education, students enrolled in the Liberal Studies Program. LIBA options (goal-oriented, thematic/topical, and career-orientated) remain with the addition of a “pre-professional” option described as “interdisciplinary study intended to prepare the student to enter a particular career field” (p. 7). Commentary addresses concerns regarding the intellectual value of the degree and alignment to the LIBA structure. Though career-oriented, the degree maintains a strong liberal arts curriculum and includes significant liberal arts coursework (pp. 7–8). In a section of the report that discusses additional options, a proposed concentration within a degree in “Tourism and Hospitality Studies” is outlined.
- **1996 – Liberal Studies Self-Study-** The description and intent of the LIBA remain similar to the previous self-study. The narrative includes direct discussion of a group of students representing education, and notes that “Teacher Education is not a stand-alone major at Stockton, and as it makes no sense for these students either to repeat or change previous majors, our solution has been to enroll them in Liberal Studies” (p. 3). Although this was the case at the time, conversation also included faculty concern from the growing major and spoke of a proposal to end the use of LIBAs for this purpose (p. 4).
- **2002 – Liberal Studies Self Study** – This self-study mimics much of the previous self-study and elaborates on an external evaluator’s review from 1997 recommending that teacher education programs be removed from the LIBA Program (p. 4). The program, since this time, had shifted from General Studies to the Division of Professional Studies as a second BA in Teacher Education. Conversation focuses on the shift in enrollment within the LIBA, noting that lower enrollment is more reflective of the intent and philosophy of the program.
- **2007 – Liberal Studies Self-Study** – This study contains narrative consistent with the previous self-study, noting the focus on students designing their own curricula aligned with their educational interests or goals not met by existing Stockton degree programs. The

interdisciplinary nature of the degree is emphasized, as is the importance of moving beyond “largely cognitive islands of knowledge” to interdisciplinary approaches (p. 7).

- **2010 – Liberal Studies Program Coordinator Report** – This report discusses the increased interest in the LIBA degree. While student-designed curricula remain, the report also notes the “development of a more structured LIBA degree” (p. 1). This degree, a BA in Interdisciplinary Studies (BAIS), was discussed as a possible avenue for students that may not seek a fully self-designed program but would benefit from the interdisciplinary nature of the degree.
- **2012 – Enhancements to the LIBA** – The Faculty Senate adopted the recommendations of a LIBA working group (established in 2010) to make minor changes to LIBA including: “(1) the opportunity for a Stockton student to create a LIBA program of study, concentrating on courses within a single School or from courses in a specific General Studies’ minor and (2) the provision for examples or ‘prompts’ for students to consult when crafting LIBA curricula” (p. 1). According to the working group report, these changes were meant to: “broaden a potential LIBA student’s imagination of the possibilities for the LIBA, provide ‘prompts’ to a potential LIBA student’s planning, and extend the administration of the LIBA to various School Deans” (p. 2). The working group also made it clear that “all LIBA students will be expected to meet the longstanding standards embedded in the current LIBA” (p. 2).
- **2017 – Liberal Studies Five-Year Review** – The five-year review begins with a narrative similar to past studies with emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the program and its alignment to Stockton University’s mission. LIBA is described as “for the most part a passive program, a container of many shapes, that responds to needs but does not reach out to create them” (p. 4). Developments within LIBA since the last review included the four-year pathways to teacher certification (p.2). LIBA is further described as serving as an “incubator” in the past, helping to establish a program in Communication Studies. In regard to viability, the self-designed major is noted as necessary to allow for the “emerging and innovative curricular needs on the part of individual students or of Stockton’s schools, when those needs cannot be met by existing programs” (p. 2). Additionally, the potential for large-scale projects such as the four-year pathway to teacher certification for the proposed Community Leadership and Civic Engagement project, [LIBA] “remain a viable and necessary program for this University” (p. 4). Within a discussion of the school-based LIBA, the four-year teacher certification pathway is examined. Existing pathways are described as covering a wide array of disciplines needing a “more general approach” versus secondary pathways that fit within existing content majors making the LIBA BA “the most logical place to house such a plan” (p. 6). The report also notes that “This program [LIBA four-year teacher certification] has grown rapidly since its inception and so it can be said that nearly all of the faculty in the School of Education comprise the faculty of the Liberal Studies BA concentrations in Elementary Education and in Language Arts and Social Studies. They handle all precepting responsibilities for students in these concentrations” (p. 6).
- **2018 – LIBA Close the Loop Memo** – This memo from the Provost’s office documents the review of the 2017 report. Potential action items noted included: continuing the offering of LIBA for students seeking an option for degree completion or a customized major, using the LIBA as an incubator for new major programs (limiting LIBAs for this purpose to 3-5 years), and evaluating LIBA policies on the credit limit related to the declaration of the major. Discussion items included the creation of a Faculty Senate Taskforce, convened to review the

LIBA structure. Those in attendance “agreed not to make any substantial changes to the organization or administration of the LIBA until the task force finishes its work and, once it does, to follow the Faculty Senate’s recommendations” (p. 2).

Research and Findings

The current LIBA Taskforce recognizes that the LIBA degree affords students the opportunity to design a degree in areas that are currently not available at Stockton. The LIBA also provides students the ability to construct interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programs of study that draw from across various Schools and Programs. We support a path for a student-created degree and believe that the enhancements to the LIBA degree approved in 2012 provide a framework to help students in designing a program of study. The 2012 enhancements remain true to the spirit of the LIBA degree as being student-designed and provide prompts that are only the starting point for a student-written LIBA proposal.

However, the Taskforce believes that LIBA should be the exception, not the rule. By this, we mean that the creation of LIBA prompts and concentrations should not be used to circumvent the approval process for new degree-granting Programs. If the faculty believe a discipline or area of study has enough student interest or demand, then a new degree should be proposed using the existing approval process. In light of this, there may need to be a mechanism in place to periodically evaluate prompts to determine if the numbers of students pursuing LIBA proposals and degrees in these areas warrants the evolution of the LIBA concentration into its own major (or minor).

The Taskforce recommends remaining true to the spirit of original intent of the LIBA degree as a student-designed program of study. We continue to support the creation of prompts for students to begin the design of a LIBA proposal, with the understanding that these proposals will still be student-written and evaluated by faculty members as currently described in the Bulletin. The CLCE concentration, reviewed and recommended by the Faculty Senate in 2018, is a good example of a framework designed to help students construct a program of study in the multidisciplinary area of community leadership and civic engagement while adhering to the original intent of the LIBA degree and existing procedures.² The only other alternative to a student-designed LIBA would be the creation a separate interdisciplinary/ multidisciplinary degree, such as the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (BAIS) that was conceived several years ago. Whether this route could or should be pursued, however, is beyond the scope of this Taskforce’s charge.

As mentioned previously, prompts or concentrations within LIBA have the potential to grow; there should be a structure in place to periodically review any approved prompt/concentration and to determine whether evolution to a major or minor is appropriate. We suggest this be considered as the Life Cycle for Degree Programs (Procedure 2040) is revised in the near future. The frequency of review and the path from a prompt to a major or minor should be articulated. The current Academic Programs and Planning Committee of the Faculty Senate would be a reasonable body to begin this evaluation, with review by the Faculty Senate as well. Perhaps there may be an expedited internal

² <https://www.stockton.edu/general-studies/community-leadership-civic-engagement.html>

process for LIBA concentrations to be evaluated as they potentially evolve into a major and/or minor.

There is a long history of students pursuing education certification through LIBA as outlined previously. The taskforce recognizes that the route to early childhood and elementary school teaching certification as currently constructed requires, in addition to professional courses in Education, courses from across many disciplines and thus does not have a true discipline-specific “home” at Stockton. At the same time, we also note that, while multidisciplinary in nature, the more structured nature of this concentration does not align with the student-created design of the LIBA degree. Because of the unique nature and specialized path, as well as regulations for education certification, the Taskforce believes the current EDUC pathways within LIBA are acceptable but do not propose that they set a precedent. More specifically, we recommend that no new structured LIBA offerings like EDUC early childhood and elementary education are introduced.

Workload equity in administering concentrations within LIBA is a major concern of the Taskforce. If the number of these prompts/concentrations grows (Figures 1 & 2), the required faculty oversight and student mentoring through the proposal process will also continue to increase, and they are already inconsistencies. As currently organized, for example, the CLCE concentration has a compensated concentration coordinator while EDUC LIBA does not. Moving forward, if additional formal prompts/concentrations are approved there must be a fair approach to faculty workload and compensation. We suggest this is addressed in an equitable way as the Union, Senate, and administration work to evaluate the current faculty leadership structure.

Summary and Recommendations

- Stockton should remain true to the spirit of original intent of the LIBA degree as a student-designed program of study, and continue to support the creation of prompts for students to begin the design of a LIBA proposal.
- The creation of LIBA prompts should not be used to circumvent the approval process for new degree-granting Programs.
- There should be a structure in place to periodically review any approved prompts within LIBA to determine whether evolution to a major or minor is appropriate. This should be considered as the Life Cycle for Degree Programs (Procedure 2040) is revised in the near future.
- Because of the unique nature and specialized path, as well as regulations for education certification, the current EDUC pathways within LIBA are acceptable but do not set a precedent.
- No new structured LIBA offerings like EDUC early childhood and elementary education should be introduced.
- If additional prompts are approved, there must be a fair approach to faculty workload and compensation.

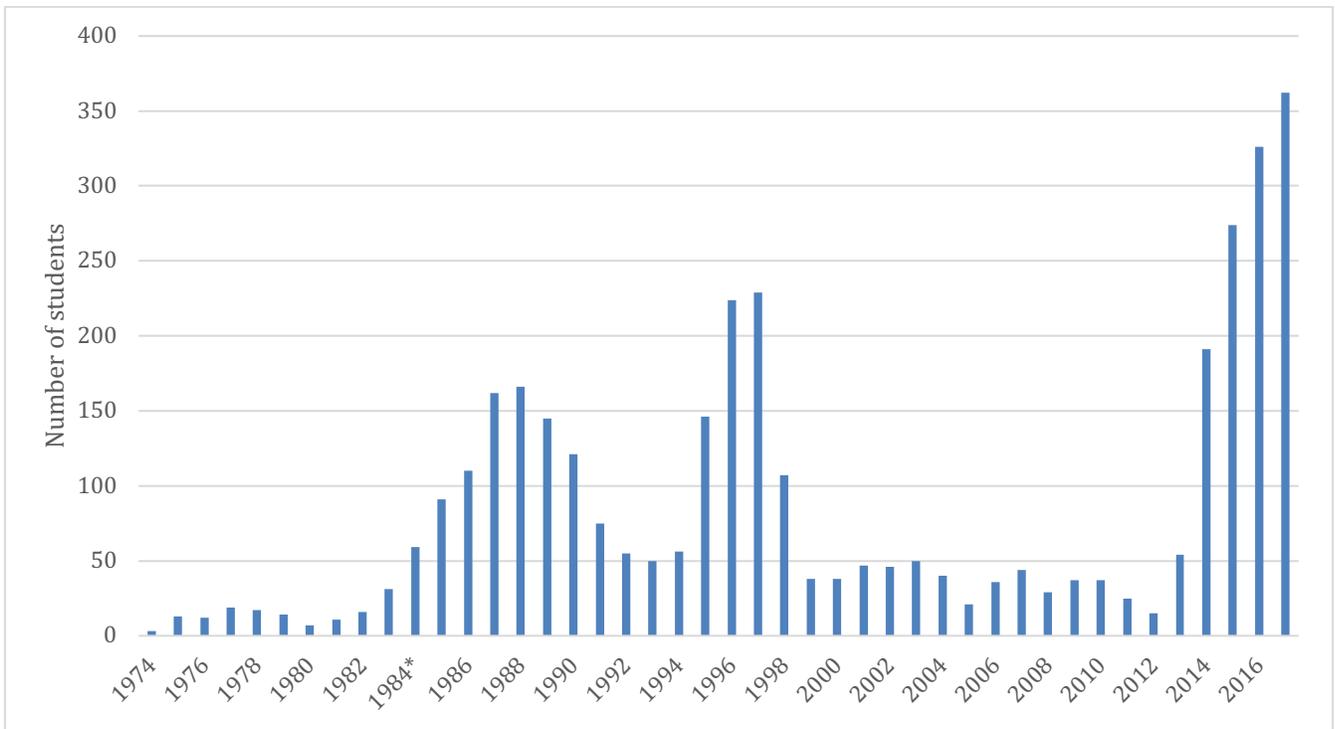


Figure 1 – Number of declared LIBA students per year (data from Institutional Research)

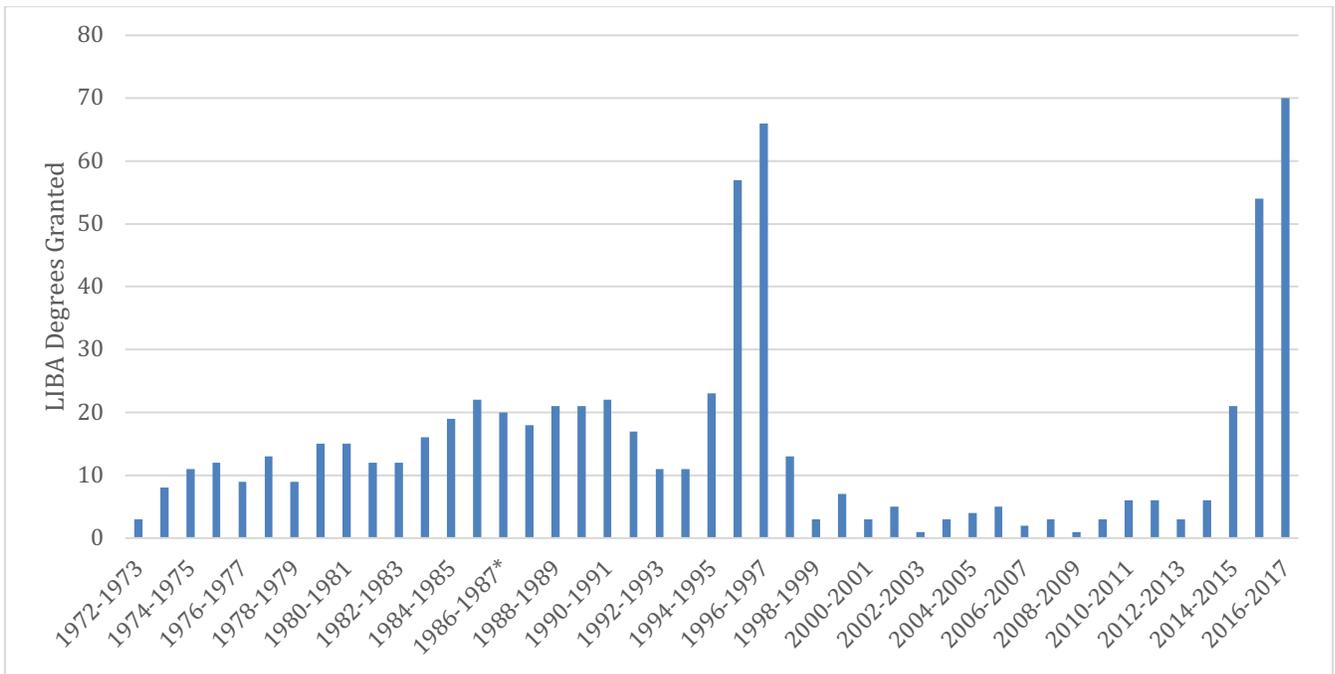


Figure 2 – Number of LIBA degrees granted per academic year (data from Institutional Research). 1996/1997 saw a peak in LIBA degrees as a percentage of all degrees granted (5%). 10 of the 70 LIBA degrees awarded in 2016/2017 are non-EDUC concentration LIBAs.