

Program Review Executive Summary

General and Individual Studies

Majors Reviewed:

- *General Studies, A.A.*
- *Individual Studies, A.A.S.*

2015



General Studies (GS) and Individual Studies (IS) are long-standing majors at Penn College. GS is a traditional transfer curriculum designed to provide a foundation in general education for students who intend to transfer, internally or externally, into bachelor-degree majors. IS is an alternative degree that allows students to pursue their interests without being bound by the requirements of a specific major. In both majors, students have significant flexibility because the curricula consist primarily of electives. Students are able to choose courses that reflect their interests and ultimate goals.

Students in these two majors are similar in quality and performance to other Penn College students. The difference is their academic and career focuses. GS and IS are not the typical technical hands-on degrees that are the essence of the College. However, they fulfill the College's mission to create and sustain excellence in a student-centered environment that promotes personal growth, social awareness, a shared commitment to diversity, and lifelong learning, all of which help prepare graduates for success. The courses that GS and IS students take—whether in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, or communication—contribute to the students' continued development in the above areas.

The quality of the faculty who teach General Studies and Individual Studies students is a significant strength. Although no faculty are officially hired to teach in these majors, general education faculty teach the majority of the courses the students take; these faculty members are well educated, well prepared, and dedicated teachers. Other outstanding strengths include the similarity of the program goals to those of general education at typical transfer institutions, transfer success, and high levels of student satisfaction.

Competition is a challenge for these majors, especially GS, because students may find a similar program at almost any community college or four-year institution. The traditional mission of Penn College as an open admission institution attracts students who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend college. Non-traditional students, students who lack a strong high school record, and students who have experienced difficulty elsewhere can begin here, gain their academic footing, establish a record of academic success, and then transfer either internally or externally.

In addition to attracting students, other challenges include higher tuition than alternative institutions and lack of recognition. While marketing has increased, no resulting enrollment effect is evident. Internal efforts must continue to assure all advisers are aware of how GS and IS majors can be used to help students through difficult transitions. Although little can be done about tuition differences, quality of coursework must be assured, and transferability options must be effectively communicated. GS and IS should continue to advance the mission of Penn College and prepare students for success in whatever majors and careers they ultimately pursue.

Recommendations:

- Promote GS and IS internally as an option for students who might otherwise drop out or transfer to another college. These majors are ideal safety nets for students who are in need of a program change but are unsure of what programs to explore. College faculty who work with students who are considering dropping out or do not qualify for their specialized program should consider redirecting these students to these majors. The GS and IS advisors are well trained in helping students find programs of interest;

therefore, short-term enrollment in GS or IS may help students quickly find a major of interest within the College.

- Remove the IS and GS majors from the standard program review format. An executive summary and continual internal review remain essential; however, a redesigned format may better measure the strengths and areas of needed growth for these majors.