

# BLS DEGREE

The **Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) degree** is designed for adults whose life and/or experiences may require a non-traditional approach to completing their degree. The program is intended for students who, for example, have graduated from high school six or more years ago; are financially self-supporting; or have significant life or professional experiences that translate into academic knowledge that can contribute to the completion of the Bachelor's degree. Unlike a traditional baccalaureate degree, the BLS offers greater flexibility in the timetable leading to graduation because it does not require full-time study, extended residence at the University or language requirements (unless one majors in a language). A maximum of 90 semester hours of transfer credit may be used to fulfill the requirements for the BLS degree. These credits may include a maximum of 30 credits earned through military service and a maximum of 30 credits earned through a life/work portfolio. BLS students may choose to major in any one of the more than 30 majors available in arts and sciences or may create a self-designed, interdisciplinary major (subject to the approval of the Bachelor of Liberal Studies Committee). BLS students may also select the Leadership and Management major. This major is open only to BLS students.

The BLS degree requires a minimum of 120 semester hours, distributed in three categories: general education, major, and electives. Students must also take courses listed as writing intensive and speaking intensive. BLS students generally take courses from among those listed in the College of Arts and Sciences section of the *Catalog*. A grade-point average of 2.00 on all work at the University of Mary Washington is also required, with no more than six credits in physical education courses counting toward the degree.

BLS students are invited and encouraged to enroll in the orientation course BLS Advising Modules in Canvas. Others may wish to enroll in BLST 101 Portfolio Development, for assistance in developing portfolios that document learning gained through life and work for possible conversion to academic credit.

Additional important information is contained in the BLS General Education Requirements (<https://catalog.umw.edu/undergraduate/general-education/requirements-bachelor-liberal-studies-degrees/>).

## Portfolio Credit (Credit for Life/Work Experience)

The portfolio system is designed to award college credit for applicable college-level learning acquired through nonacademic experiences. Portfolio credit is available to students enrolled in the Bachelor of Liberal Studies (BLS) program. Students in the Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Sciences degree programs are not eligible for portfolio credit. Learning documented in the portfolio must be equivalent in scope and complexity to what students learn in college classrooms. Hence, the portfolio system is a way of recognizing experiential learning, which is generally equivalent to college classroom learning. All credit earned through portfolio assessment must be measurable or verifiable by a qualified, formally-appointed assessor; such credit is considered transfer credit.

While a great deal is learned from life's experiences, e.g., marriage and parenthood, these experiences do not automatically translate into college credit; a portfolio must present what a student has learned in such a way that the assessor can identify and measure it. While most adults can do a great many complex things – such as complete income tax

forms, balance checkbooks, and vote for presidential candidates – the University does not award college credit for typical adult competencies.

Individuals who wish to present a portfolio must be enrolled at the University as BLS degree-seeking students. In addition, they are required to enroll in and satisfactorily complete BLST 101 Portfolio Development Portfolio Development, prior to presenting the portfolio for assessment. This course carries one pass/fail credit and is offered on an as-needed basis. The course defines the kind of learning a portfolio can present successfully, provides a detailed outline of the portfolio format, and offers each student specific instruction in the assembly of the initial stages of his/her portfolio. It also outlines additional methods, other than the portfolio, for providing documentation of experiential learning for college credit.

The usual ceiling for portfolio credit awards is 15 credits; in exceptional cases the award can be as high as 30 credits. Thirty is the maximum number of credits that can be awarded through the portfolio, and applied toward the degree. Due to the nature of the program and changing technologies, students currently enrolled in the BLS program should not include knowledge and experiences older than 10 years; exceptions are considered on an individual basis. Students may submit as many portfolios as they like, and each one is not to exceed 250 typewritten pages. The assessment fee for each portfolio is \$100. Portfolios must be submitted prior to accumulating 90 semester hours of transfer credit. Students using GI Bill® benefits will not be charged the portfolio assessment fee.

Portfolios must be submitted to the BLS Office within 12 months of completion of the portfolio course, and must be submitted prior to the student's final semester in the degree program. Credits awarded may be used to satisfy general education requirements, elective credit requirements, and selected major credit requirements.

Because there is a significant amount of work involved in preparing a portfolio with no guarantee of a successful outcome, students should discuss the project at some length with their faculty advisors and with the BLS Office (Combs Hall, Room 108). If the decision is made to pursue credit awards through the portfolio process, permission to enroll in BLST 101 Portfolio Development Portfolio Development must be secured from the BLS Office.

## Transfer Credit

The transfer credit total for the Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree – including a combination of credits from other accredited institutions, standardized tests, portfolio, military, CLEP and ACE – cannot exceed 90 semester credits. Contingent on an evaluation of course content, transfer credit may be used to satisfy general education, concentration, or elective credit requirements.

The University accepts many of the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and DANTES Subject Standardized tests as undergraduate transfer credit. Students may earn credit by meeting the minimum required score on selected CLEP or DANTES tests; these credits may be used to fulfill general education and other requirements or as elective credits. The Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree program follows American Council on Education (ACE) recommended guidelines for CLEP and DANTES exams as minimum scores for granting credit. A maximum of 30 credits by examination may be counted toward the degree. Students should consult the BLS Office for information on specific CLEP or DANTES exams that are accepted by the University. CLEP tests are

administered at local universities. DANTES exams are offered only on military installations.

## Second Degree or Post-Baccalaureate Major

A student who has earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Mary Washington and wishes to pursue further undergraduate work may either complete a post-baccalaureate major and have it noted on the permanent record (with the date of completion) or earn a second degree if it is different from the first degree (for example, a subsequent B.A. or BLS, if the first degree was a B.S.).

**Second Degree.** The student must apply for admission to the new degree program through the Office of Admissions and must earn at least 30 additional credits at Mary Washington after completion of the first degree. No more than 14 of these credits can be completed prior to matriculation for the second degree. The most appropriate 90 credits will be selected to count toward the second degree. The student must complete the major program and general education requirements in the Academic Catalog in effect at the time of matriculation into the second degree.

A student who earned his or her first degree from another institution must enter Mary Washington as a transfer student, then complete the major program and general education requirements of the second degree as defined in the Academic Catalog in effect at the time of matriculation into the second degree.

**Post-Baccalaureate Major.** A student who has earned a degree at UMW who is completing only an additional major must complete the Major Program requirements printed in the Academic Catalog at the time of major declaration if the student has not discontinued enrollment at UMW for more than two semesters. A student returning after an absence of more than two semesters will be required to complete the major program requirements listed in the Academic Catalog in effect at the time of re-enrollment. Any B.A./B.S./BSEd student wishing to pursue a post-baccalaureate major must apply in the Office of the Registrar. A BLS student must apply in the BLS Office.

## Taking Graduate Courses as an Undergraduate

An undergraduate student with 18 or fewer hours of course work remaining for degree completion may take up to six hours of graduate credit beyond the undergraduate degree requirements. Such graduate credit may be counted toward a master's degree at the University, but will not be used to fulfill undergraduate degree requirements *unless the student receives special permission*. The student must have a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade-point average and must receive permission from his/her academic advisor and the chair of the department offering the course.