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# **A Guide to College Success for Post-Traditional Students**

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A Volume in:  
Adult Learning in Professional, Organizational, and Community Settings

*Series Editor:*  
Carrie Boden-McGill  
*Texas State University*

# Adult Learning in Professional, Organizational, and Community Settings

*Series Editors:*

Carrie Boden-McGill  
Texas State University

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*Edited by*  
**Henry S. Merrill**



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# FOREWORD/ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The purpose of this book is to assist students to achieve success in the Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies (OWLS) Department and earn the BAAS Degree at Texas State University. The idea for this text emerged in a fall retreat workshop to revise the BAAS curriculum. Patricia Brewer, the workshop facilitator, asked the questions, “What do we want to build together?” and “What do students in the BAAS program need?” The following text offers the best thinking of the OWLS faculty and staff in regard to these questions. A two day workshop turned into a two year project, the addition of two new courses in the BAAS program (CTE 3313E Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies for the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences Degree and OCED 4111 Independent Study in Occupational Education), and significant revisions to all other required courses in the program (OCED 4350 Occupational Assessment and OCED 4360 Cooperative OCED Readiness, and 4361 capstone in Cooperative OCED).

The writing and publication of the book is part of a process of OWLS course and curriculum revision under the direction of Dr. Carrie Boden, Former Chair of the OWLS Department. Dr. Henry S. Merrill served as an external consultant assisting with the curriculum revision process and guiding the development of the book in collaboration with OWLS faculty colleagues Dr. Catherine A. Cherrstrom,

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Dr. Matthew Eichler, Dr. Patricia Gibson, Dr. Omar Lopez, Dr. Todd Sherron, and Ms. Barbara Wilson.

We also want to recognize and thank Portia Gottschall for her excellent proof-reading and editing skills. Her attention to detail is an important contribution to make this a more useable book.



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# INTRODUCTION

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## **WELCOME TO THE BACHELOR OF APPLIED ARTS AND SCIENCES (BAAS) PROGRAM!**

Welcome to the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) program in the Department of Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies (OWLS) at Texas State University. The program is designed to serve adult learners like you (also called non-traditional or post-traditional students), who may meet some or all of the following criteria: 25 years old or older, attend school part time, work full-time, financially independent, have dependents, and/or did not receive a standard high school diploma.

For many post-traditional learners, completing a college degree is a lifelong dream that leads to upward economic mobility. According to the most recent U.S. Census bureau data, workers who earn a bachelor's degree earn 45.45% more than those who hold only a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In the OWLS Department, our mission includes helping you reach your earning and professional potential by providing a flexible, interdisciplinary plan of study in which you choose courses that meet your needs and interests. These hybrid and online courses feature active learning, experiential learning, critical reflection and self-reflection, as well as interaction with course content and peers in subjects

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**“Those professors are remarkable, they are second to none. They value your experiences that you’ve had out in the world, and not just in your first class, but throughout the classes. They’re just as diverse as the student body.”**

**- Sandra Brooks, BAAS, MSIS**

FIGURE 1. Sandra Brooks Testimonial.

relevant to career and other goals. Last, the BAAS degree includes an option to participate in prior learning assessment (PLA), a process that allows you to apply for credit for prior college-level learning in the workplace. According to alumni feedback and testimonials, the BAAS program has been transformational in the lives of students, as described in Figure 1 above.

Conceptually, the BAAS plan of study includes five major components: the foundational, cornerstone, occupational emphasis, professional development, and capstone modules (See Table 1). The foundational module is not so much a set of courses, but rather an introduction to the philosophy and practice of the degree, including individualized degree planning. The BAAS differs from other degree programs in that you, in consultation with an advisor, will create your own unique plan of study, including an applied capstone project. As an advocate and ally, this advisor will help you select the best set of courses to reach personal and professional goals. Next, in the cornerstone module, you will complete 48 semester hours, including the general education core curriculum as well as the Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies for the BAAS Degree and Adult Development and Career Planning courses.

The program builds from this cornerstone to the occupational emphasis, professional development, and capstone modules. In the occupational emphasis module, you will complete 48 semester hours focused on past or current work experience and one optional course, Independent Study in Prior Learning Assessment, where you may complete a portfolio to apply for credit for college-level learning in the workplace. In the professional development model, you will select courses to build knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet personal and professional goals. As a key part of an interdisciplinary program of study, this module may contain one to three areas of emphasis totaling 21 semester credit hours. Finally, in the capstone module, you will apply what you have learned in an organizational setting. The capstone includes two courses in which you will design and complete

TABLE 1. Texas State University's Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) Program

<b>Texas State University's Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) Program (120 SCH)</b>		
<b>Foundation</b>		
What do you need to be successful in the BAAS program?		
Designed for you—an adult learner (also called non-traditional or post-traditional student)		
Accelerated, active, applied, experiential and, interactive learning. Critical reflection and self-reflection embedded in curriculum design		
Individualized degree plan and advising		
<b>Cornerstone (48 SCH)</b>		
Why are you here? What is the program about? What will you learn?		
General education core curriculum		
CTE	3313E	Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies
OCED	4350	Adult Development and Career Planning
<b>Occupational Emphasis Module (48 SCH)</b>		
Where have you been?		
OCED	4111	Independent Study in Prior Learning Assessment (PLA)
Courses of your choice		
<b>Professional Development Module (21 SCH)</b>		
Where do you want to go? What knowledge, skills, and abilities to you need to get there?		
Courses of your choice		
<b>Capstone Module (6 SCH)</b>		
What learning can you demonstrate?		
OCED	4360	BAAS Capstone Part 1
OCED	4361	BAAS Capstone Part 2

an applied project related to your professional development module. The capstone projects are validated by on-site-supervisors and experts.

The faculty and staff in the OWLS program are here to guide and support you on the journey toward completing your degree. We are glad you are here.

The Department of Occupational, Workforce, and Leadership Studies (OWLS) prepares students for workplace success. We accomplish this mission through an accelerated, applied, undergraduate degree-completion program and graduate programs, including working with students who seek a non-traditional approach in completing a degree. In addition, we value discovery and understanding and accomplish this mission through research and service. This is in keeping with Texas State University's mission as a public, student-centered, Emerging Research University dedicated to excellence in serving the educational needs of the diverse population of Texas and the world beyond.

## OUR SHARED VALUES

In pursuing our mission, we, the faculty, staff, and students of Texas State University, are guided by a shared collection of values. Specifically, we value:

- An exceptional undergraduate experience as the heart of what we do;
- Graduate education as a means of intellectual growth and professional development;
- A diversity of people and ideas, a spirit of inclusiveness, a global perspective, and a sense of community as essential conditions for campus life;
- The cultivation of character and the modeling of honesty, integrity, compassion, fairness, respect, and ethical behavior, both in the classroom and beyond;
- Engaged teaching and learning based in dialogue, student involvement, and the free exchange of ideas;
- Research, scholarship, and creative activity as fundamental sources of new knowledge and as expressions of the human spirit;
- A commitment to public service as a resource for personal, educational, cultural, and economic development;
- Thoughtful reflection, collaboration, planning, and evaluation as essential for meeting the changing needs of those we serve (Texas State University, 2012).

## PURPOSE OF THE BAAS DEGREE PROGRAM

You have begun an important journey—the journey to a bachelor’s degree. As a student in the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences (BAAS) degree program at Texas State University, you will be taking a number of courses to complete your degree. The degree program has only four required courses in common, unlike other degree programs at the university where a larger number of required courses would be part of the degree program. This text will act as a guide in those four classes as you move through your degree program.

Undoubtedly, as a student, you have questions about the degree path you have chosen. What will you do in your classes? What will you do in your degree program? What sort of a capstone experience will you plan to complete? How soon will you complete the degree? What courses will I take? How much credit will I receive in the prior learning assessment process? What will happen after the degree in terms of my career? What does this degree mean?

## SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

We all like definite answers and certainty about our decisions. Career, health, and financial decisions often consider what is certain, what is likely, and what amount of risk is present in any decision (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). The BAAS degree program is unlike others at Texas State University and other universities.

Later sections of this text will reveal how these differences avail themselves to students in the program. For the purposes of this discussion, you should know that no two individuals in the program have the same plan to complete this degree. There are a variety of ways to complete the credits to earn your degree—and within each of the ways, there are a number of choices. The degree offers many options unavailable elsewhere at the university, however, with the variety of choices and unfolding of these choices, a high degree of ambiguity is part of the degree planning process.

One very tangible example of this ambiguity is the process of applying for credit for prior learning through the prior learning assessment (PLA) process. This process takes time as you develop a portfolio, for the portfolio to be checked by the instructor, assessed by evaluators, and for a credit recommendation to be developed and approved by the department chair. Since the number of credits received in this process can affect how many courses and what type of courses you take to complete the degree requirements, you may not know in advance what courses to complete until that PLA process is completed. The benefit of the PLA process in this case is that you may be able to receive quite a number of credits towards your degree, but the cost is that it takes time to develop documentation of your workplace and other learning, and you, as a student, will not know the number of credits to be received until after the assessment process is complete. This may affect how long the degree will take you to complete. This option for prior learning assessment is not available in other majors at the university and is of great benefit if you need the credits, but it takes time.

The search for answers, whether in your workplace, the university, or your personal life, can take time and patience. Indeed, Socrates wrote “..the unexamined life is not worth living,” (as cited in Plato, 1966) holding high the virtue of reflection and the search for true knowledge. The tolerance for these ambiguities will assist you in working through your degree program and probably greatly benefit you in your future pursuits, whether they involve your career, your family, or your community engagement. Ambiguity in this context relates to what may be unfamiliar, incomplete, or overly complex, and the response you have to these situations. Some people respond with anxiety, while others are able to interpret ambiguous situations as situations needing further information or time before certainty may be reached. Another possible response to ambiguous situations is to be open to change over time, knowing that you may have to deal with limited information in planning or drawing conclusions, but that this may change over time as additional data are gained. While the tolerance (or intolerance) of ambiguity is seen as a personality characteristic (Budner, 1962), it does vary by the culture in which an individual was raised (Hofstede, 1984), and may be changed through thinking in new ways (Bartunek & Louis, 1988). We hope you will embrace this necessary ambiguity as you engage in your degree journey with us.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPTERS

This book is intended to serve as a guide for a degree with much flexibility, adaptability, and support for you as a learner concerned about your personal and professional growth. The purpose of the book is to provide information for you as a student throughout your time in the program. The book will serve as a text for core classes and as a handbook for degree completion. You will be introduced to a number of important concepts and be given a preview of your required courses as well as ideas about how to design a project plan to complete your degree. You will be assigned to read various portions of the book for OCED required classes as you complete your degree. You may want to jump ahead and read sections to discover what will be coming up in the future courses. You will have many opportunities to make choices in your time completing this degree—we want to inform those choices as best we can.

Chapter One, *Designing a Project Plan for Your Degree*, presents an overview of the requirements to complete the BAAS in the context of project planning. This discussion invites you to view earning your degree as a project you need to design and complete during the next couple of years. Chapter Two, *Prior Learning Assessment*, provides background on prior learning assessment (PLA) concepts in post-secondary education and a guide to the process of developing a portfolio for the OECD 4111 Independent Study for PLA course. Chapter Three, *Useful Resources for All Courses*, is divided into six sections. These sections provide overviews written by faculty subject matter experts with resources for understanding effective writing processes; approaching research in your courses; becoming critical thinkers; creating a problem statement for your capstone; learning about project planning, human performance planning and career development; and, finally, increasing familiarity with the internet and computer technology. Chapter Four, *Official Course Descriptions for OWLS Courses Required for BAAS Degree*, provides the official course descriptions for CTE 3313E Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies for the Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences Degree; OCED 4111 Independent Study in Occupational Education; OCED 4350 Occupational Assessment; and OCED 4360 Cooperative OCED Readiness and 4361 capstone in Cooperative. The final section of the book, titled *Appendix—Glossary of Terms for the BAAS Degree*, is a useful resource for understanding many of the terms and acronyms you'll hear at Texas State University.

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