# INTRODUCTION

The *Concept Paper* is the initial draft of the *Application for New Program Approval* with which the initiator(s) should become familiar. Submission of the *Concept Paper* to the CSCU Academic Council affords the initiator(s) the opportunity to receive critical, informative feedback from the System’s chief academic officers; whose endorsement is a prerequisite for submission of the *Application* to the Board’s Academic and Student Affairs Committee that decides upon program approval.

**NOTE:** The MicroSoft Word text boxes below are expandable and the *Concept Paper* is limited to five pages.

## PROPOSED NEW PROGRAM

| Title of Proposed New Program: Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) |
| Title of Credential: Bachelor of General Studies |
| Total Number of Course Credits Required: 120 |
| Institution and Institutional Unit: CCSU |
| Initiator(s)/Faculty Status and/or Position: Beth Frankel Merenstein, Professor, Assistant to the Dean of the Ammon College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences |

**Directions:** Summarize the investigative research, academic development, student interest, and/or any business/industry or service involvement that led to the generation of the idea for the proposed academic program.

The Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) degree is a pathway for a variety of students including incoming transfer, adult learners and/or veterans who have accumulated credits at other institutions. A personalized pathway, manifest as themes within a BGS, may be particularly attractive to adult learners, who are expected to increasingly pursue baccalaureate degrees at a rate of 0.7% per year through 2027 (National Center for Education Statistics).

The BGS will also serve students who are stalled in a professional program (i.e., Nursing, education, business, engineering, athletic training) and are looking to earn a baccalaureate degree. For various reasons, such students have limited options when they cannot meet the GPA requirements and/or cannot complete certain gateway requirements for professional programs. A BGS would offer these students a more efficient pathway to success and avoid additional debt.

CCSU has pursued developing a BGS in the past but lacked widespread support. The current concept of the BGS was developed with representatives from four academic schools at CCSU, all of whom recognized the importance of providing students with another pathway to a baccalaureate degree.

Students will be able to apply to CCSU’s BGS only after completing at least 60 credits. As such, the BGS will not be available for first-year applicants to pursue, but rather will become an option after students have sufficient experience with college-level learning and receive appropriate academic advising to help students make an informed decision.
NEED

Directions: See “Addressing Identified Needs” in Section 2 of the Application for New Program Approval and state the need(s) to be addressed by the proposed academic program and the manner in which the proposed program would address the described need(s).

There are those in the CT community who have attended some college and never completed their degree. These adults are unable to move forward on a career path that requires a college degree, yet they are not able (for a variety of reasons) to complete a more traditional, discipline-based major. This would benefit not only students seeking to complete their degree in a timely manner, but their employers in CT who want these employees to advance into positions that require a baccalaureate credential.

Indeed, the National Center for Education Statistics predicts that enrollment among adult students will increase by over 500,000 students by 2027, amounting to an average increase of 0.7% per year.

Additionally, we have students who begin their journey with a clear discipline-based major, but for various reasons are unable to complete it. Often, they meet the prerequisites but then struggle to maintain the grade point average for required courses. These students still want to focus on the area of interest, but are unable to complete the traditional program. The BGS with themes gives them this opportunity.

Our retention data indicate that we lose on average 11% of our first-time full-time students between their second and third year, perhaps because students are getting stalled within a traditional program.
Unfortunately, students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds appear to be particularly vulnerable between their second and third year:

In fewer than 50% of the years since 2000 were Black and/or Hispanic students retained to equal or greater degrees than White students. The cumulative gap is approximately 3% and has widened since 2015.

Further, CCSU has students who apply for graduation but then do not complete requirements and leave the university. These numbers are increasing:

The BGS, by its nature, would be more interdisciplinary than the traditional majors CCSU offers. For example, we have specific science majors, yet a student who has a general interest in science or who might find themselves stalled in a particular scientific discipline might want to pursue a BGS with a theme in STEM instead. With a BGS, a student could work with the credits they have already received and pursue a path aligned with their career plans and interests. Further, students could benefit from interacting with more faculty across disciplines.

These students have then also accumulated debt for an education they never completed. There is little doubt that these students would benefit from having the option of a BGS.
SCSU and ESCU have successful Bachelor of General Studies programs. Eastern’s BGS has produced approximately 110 conferrals on average over the past 5 years. We believe that considering our location in the state, we could offer this program to many adults in the larger community who seek the opportunity to complete their baccalaureate studies. Additionally, while these schools appear to have a more general program, we see ours as providing students a theme within the larger general studies program. Students will not just receive a BGS, but the BGS will provide students with a specific theme to help them in their future education or career plans.

We expect that the BGS will advance the second goal in CCSU’s Strategic Plan 2030 – Increasing Access to Higher Education and Ensuring Student Success. Not only can a BGS attract nontraditional students seeking more flexible interdisciplinary opportunities, but it could increase our ability to better serve transfer students who look for schools where they can apply most if not all of the credits they’ve earned elsewhere.

### STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Directions:** Broadly define the SLOs to be addressed by the proposed academic program and concisely describe assessment methodologies to be used in measuring the outcomes.

We see the Bachelor of General Studies as an extension of the general education program, with an emphasis in a particular theme. Learning outcomes are dependent upon the specific path the student chooses but will expand their knowledge in a broad area of related disciplines. However, the BGS overall will emphasize critical thinking and written communication skills throughout the program. All students will submit a portfolio in order to graduate. This portfolio will include artifacts to demonstrate the critical thinking and written communication skills, as well as the skills identified in the theme chosen.

Students can pursue a BGS with the following themes:

- **Arts and Humanities:** students will develop an appreciation for, and enhance understanding of, the arts and humanities. Relevant outcomes might include the ability to engage in literary, philosophic, and artistic expression, response, analysis, and evaluation with an interdisciplinary focus.

- **Social and Behavioral Sciences:** students will develop a social scientific understanding of the social and behavioral worlds. Some relevant outcomes will include the ability to explain how social scientists think, work, and evaluate the social and behavioral world.

- **STEM:** students will develop scientific understanding of the natural and health worlds. Some relevant outcomes will include the ability to explain how scientists think, work, and evaluate the natural and health worlds.

- **People and Industry:** students will develop a broad knowledge base as critical thinkers, effective communicators, and the ability to analyze data as it relates specifically to industry and industry participants (individual and institutional).

- **Professional Studies:** students will further develop their critical thinking and writing skills, as well as oral communication and understanding of professional agencies and organizations. Other outcomes might include the ability to analyze and evaluate professional settings.

Finally, students who choose to create their own focus area will develop a critical understanding of their chosen theme with the assistance and guidance of a faculty advisor.
### CURRICULUM

**Directions:** Provide a “Program Outline” as prescribed under Curriculum (page 4) of the *Application for New Program Approval*.

All students who graduate with a BGS will have:

- cumulative grade-point average of at least 2.00
- completion of at least 30 credits in residency at CCSU
- completion of CCSU’s general education program
- chosen a theme area, either one from the list or one as created with a faculty advisor
- met all academic requirements of the University, as well as all course requirements, including prerequisites
- at least 15 credits at the 300-400 level
- completed a portfolio

Students would apply to the BGS after earning at least 60 credits. Students will submit their application for the BGS to the Dean or Dean’s representative of the chosen area. A clear curriculum plan will be created with a faculty advisor.

### SPECIAL RESOURCES

**Directions:** Provide a brief description of resources that would be needed specifically for the proposed program and how they will be used; e.g. new faculty, laboratory equipment, specialized library collections, etc. Include in this discussion what would be the sources of revenue.

No new resources are required to implement the BGS curriculum. All courses already exist. Enrollment would drive changes in instructional expense. Coordination of the program may require reassigned time for a full-time faculty member. Release time will be reallocated from existing sources accordingly.

Our current advising structure is sufficient to serve BGS students. Students will be assigned an appropriate faculty advisor in their chosen focus area.