

# 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 veteran or active-duty members of the military; are financially self-supporting or have legal dependents other than a spouse; 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 allows part-time study and offers reduced general education requirements. 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 the College of 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. 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 BLST 102 BLS Student Academic Development. 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, 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 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 through 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.