

## FOUNDATIONAL STUDIES STATEMENT: MAKE A LIVING, MAKE A LIFE

### The Boise State Degree: Foundational Studies and a Major

Students at Boise State University complete their degrees through two intertwining tracks: general education, on our campus known as Foundational Studies,<sup>1</sup> and a major. General education requirements are designed to ensure that students acquire basic knowledge and experience in a variety of foundational disciplines that emphasize different “ways of knowing.” The curricula encourage student exploration while providing an underpinning for further academic study and citizenship. Students, faculty, and community leaders widely report that courses taken outside of their majors are instrumental in later life, either personally, professionally, or both. Those reports reaffirm our belief in the value of general education. Our campus recognizes this educational cornerstone: Foundational Studies courses make up one third of every degree at Boise State, providing the educational groundwork for all undergraduate degrees and pathways of learning.

Many students arrive on our campus in their late teens or early twenties bright and hopeful but with expectedly uncertain plans. Typically, they change their majors three to four times during their time at Boise State. General education helps students build a broad educational foundation for lifelong learning as they explore an array of academic disciplines. General education supports the individual journeys of students while also teaching them skills and knowledge that will help them meet the societal expectations of higher education: graduates who find gainful employment and become thoughtful citizens. It is for this exact purpose that the State of Idaho (and nearly every college across America) requires general education programs framed by written and oral communication, the humanities, mathematics, natural and physical sciences, and social sciences. For further reference see the State of Idaho’s general education requirements at the following website: <http://coursetransfer.idaho.gov/GemSearch.aspx>

This is why Boise State needs both Foundational Studies and the major. Together, these complementary programs enhance what students **know** about the world around them, what they can **do** with the kind of communications and problem-solving skills essential for success after the diploma, and who they can **become** in their lives on campus and long after they leave here.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundational Studies Program is in the process of changing its name to “University Foundations.” This name change has received initial approval from Boise State’s faculty senate and we expect it to take effect prior to the 2018-19 academic year.

<sup>2</sup> On the idea of “know, do, become,” see: Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. On the idea of universities as sites of “becoming,” see the following authors: Anthony Kwame Appiah, “What is the Point of College?”; Time Clydesdale, *The Purposeful Graduate*; Robert Nash and Michelle Murray, *Helping College Students Find Purpose*; Pew Research Center, “Purpose of College Education”; Jessica Robinson and Perry Glazner, “Understanding Student Purpose Types and Student Perceptions”; William Sullivan, “Renewing Liberal Education as Vocational Discernment.”

## **Goal, Learning Outcomes, and Pedagogy of Foundational Studies**

**Goal:** General education strives for courses that invite students into ways of knowing and skill development essential for contributing to a multidimensional world. This type of education accompanied by a major promises graduates who will thrive in communities as citizens and employees. To that end, Foundational Studies seeks courses that explore big ideas within a discipline rather than a traditional introduction to a major. These courses ought to ground non-majors in the core foundations of the discipline (its epistemology) and its relevance to individuals, communities, and humanity. In short, they ought to ask and answer: Why study Biology? Why study History? Why study English? Why study Art? And so on.

**University Learning Outcomes:** Boise State has eleven University Learning Outcomes that, as the course catalog notes, apply to every Boise State graduate “regardless of major or baccalaureate degree” (see pages 49 and 51 of the 2017-2018 catalog). Outcomes for written and oral communication, mathematics, natural, physical, and applied sciences, visual and performing arts, literature and humanities, and social sciences align with the Idaho Board of Education’s Statewide General Education Policy. Additional outcomes specific to Boise State include critical inquiry, innovation and teamwork, ethics, and diversity and internationalization.

**Pedagogy:** Foundational Studies honors the variety of teaching and learning philosophies and practices faculty bring to their respective courses. The program asks, however, that faculty participants make explicit, augment, or incorporate a pedagogical approach with three core educational values: 1) Know, Do, Become; 2) Teaching as an act of translation; 3) Clear articulation of relevance to students.

1) Following one of the classical frameworks of education, Foundational Studies seeks courses attuned to the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions, which we have translated into "know, do, become" for students.<sup>1</sup> We are confident that courses on this campus exhibit these values. It would be pretty challenging to teach a college course, let alone teach at all, without reference to knowledge and skills, and how these change or transform a student in some way.

2) Second, Foundational Studies seeks courses that model the importance of teaching as an act of translation. Individuals with doctoral degrees represent approximately 1.7% of the US population; Master’s degree holders represent 11% of the population. Consequently, we instructors often forget how rare it is to be steeped in a particular field and how far afield students stand in relation to that expertise. Just as a musician translates complex pieces into scales for the novice or a coach translates the game into drills before any thought to a game, Foundational Studies faculty translate, well, the foundations of disciplines as preparation for a roundly educated student.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Bain, *What the Best College Teachers Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

3) Third, Foundational Studies seeks courses that provide clear articulations of their relevance to the many paths students will embark upon after graduation. All disciplines are relevant but universities, departments, and individual courses often assume relevance without explaining the valid reasons for the assumption. Courses in both the major and Foundational Studies that sharply articulate relevance to personal and professional preparation best position students for their future as individuals and citizens.

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