

Nontraditional Degree Programs

Kimya P. Barden, Ph.D., Interim Director

Nontraditional Degree Programs (NDP) Advisory Council

Sara Aliabadi, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Kimya P. Barden, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Tim Barnett, Ph.D., Professor

Jennifer Blair, M.A., BAIS Advisor (non-voting)

Jacqueline Butler, M.A., BAIS Advisor (non-voting)

Gabriel Cortez, Ph.D., Professor

Joseph Hibdon, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Zada Johnson, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Jin Kim, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Eleni Makris, Ph.D., Associate Professor

Nancy A. Matthews, Ph.D., Professor

Erica R. Meiners, Ph.D., Professor

Nontraditional Degree Programs (<https://www.neiu.edu/academics/our-colleges-and-departments/nontraditional-degree-programs/>) provide expanded opportunities for quality education in two baccalaureate degree completion programs. These programs are self-paced and involve individualized academic advising to help students earn degrees. The programs, University Without Walls (UWW) and the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (BAIS), are designed for adult students who often have completed a number of credits at other institutions or who have acquired significant learning through their careers or community activities.

Prior Learning Assessment

One of the outstanding features of our two Nontraditional Degree Programs (NDP) is that both award credit for prior experiential learning in order to acknowledge and validate college-level learning that occurs outside the classroom.

BAIS: A Course-Based Approach

The Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (<http://catalog.neiu.edu/nontraditional-degree-programs/bachelor-arts-interdisciplinary-studies/>) (BAIS) offers students a variety of options to complete graduation requirements, including coursework, credit-by-examination tests (such as DSST and CLEP), and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). PLA helps BAIS students document experiential and other forms of learning obtained outside of school with integrity and rigor through a Prior Learning Portfolio. The program uses the course credit equivalency model of PLA. That is, students identify an existing credit-bearing course (or courses) offered by a regionally accredited American institution of higher education and consistent with their experiential learning. The student demonstrates through a portfolio how and when they gained knowledge equivalent to the content taught in the course and requests an award of credit. A faculty member with expertise in the relevant academic area evaluates the portfolio and determines the award to be credited. The total amount of credit awarded through PLA is limited to 36 credit hours for each student and may be applied to any BAIS degree requirement except residency. Learn more about BAIS and PLA by attending a prospective student meeting (PSM) offered each semester through NDP. Please note that PLA portfolios in the BAIS program can only be submitted to NDP after students have completed NDP 330: Creating a Prior Learning Portfolio. This one-credit course prepares students for the portfolio process and provides a hands-on opportunity for students to complete portfolios with expert guidance from faculty.

University Without Walls

University Without Walls (<http://catalog.neiu.edu/nontraditional-degree-programs/university-without-walls/>) is a flexible program that also uses prior learning assessment to help students complete Bachelor of Arts degrees. Students enter this program if they have obtained deep, college-level learning over a number of years through their career, community involvement, and/or self-directed study. They complete the degree through independent study and coursework as determined by university faculty and student needs. UWW students are required to bring extensive knowledge in a particular field or area of study to the program. Once admitted, students work with an individual faculty advisor to build a personalized curriculum based on their prior learning, future interests, and university requirements. UWW students also complete portfolios, but the portfolios in this program are more comprehensive than those in BAIS and cover the students' learning in their Depth Areas, Breadth Areas (Humanities, Fine Arts, Social Sciences, and Natural/Technological Sciences), and Effective Communication. UWW students complete their portfolios in their last semester of study at the university and then meet with a review board. The board reviews the portfolio and discusses the students' program of study with them before determining whether students are ready to graduate. The best way to learn about the UWW program is to attend a prospective student meeting, or PSM, offered each semester at the university.