



Office of the Provost

Program Planning Summary
to the South Carolina Commission on
Higher Education
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

January 30, 2012

Approved for President DeCenzo to Sign

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Sheehan".

Dr. Robert Sheehan
Provost and Senior Vice President
For Academic and Student Affairs

PROGRAM PLANNING SUMMARY

PROGRAM DESIGNATION

Institution:	Coastal Carolina University
Academic unit involved:	Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts
Name of proposed program:	<i>Master of Arts in Liberal Studies</i> CIP # 240101
Proposed date of implementation:	Fall 2013
New program or modification:	New program
Number of credit hours:	30

JUSTIFICATION OF NEED

Coastal Carolina University's Mission Statement calls for "selective master's programs of national and/or regional significance in the arts and sciences, business, humanities, education, and health and human services." At this time, the university has graduate programs in business, education and the natural sciences, and has just initiated a Master of Arts in Writing. However, whereas most local graduate degrees are predicated upon a tight disciplinary focus, our region still lacks opportunities for broad-based, advanced instruction in the humanities and social sciences. Therefore, the Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts proposes the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS), a graduate program designed to provide our service area with a broad-based graduate program that is flexible enough to appeal to a wide constituency, but rigorous enough to ensure that graduates have a strong grounding in the critical thinking, communication, and research skills that are the hallmarks of a liberal arts education.

The MALS is a liberal arts degree designed with graduating seniors, working adults, and nontraditional students in mind. The degree responds to a marked increase in the popularity of interdisciplinary graduate programming nationally, and is particularly appealing for our region because it is designed to respond to local demographics while taking advantage of extant capacity for graduate study at Coastal Carolina University. Our target audiences are undergraduates who are seeking advanced, interdisciplinary coursework to meet the demands of a new marketplace; adult learners seeking an intense engagement in humanistic concepts; educators looking for an advanced credential; and midcareer professionals seeking skills enrichment and broader cultural literacy. MALS programs, with their interdisciplinary ethos and orientation to nontraditional students, are often found at regional public universities, and South Carolina could benefit from more access to this type of graduate education.

The MALS concept has existed in American higher education since the 1950s, but in the past two decades, programs like the one we propose have proliferated nationally, filling a need for graduate study that is focused on the part-time adult learner who holds an undergraduate degree and wishes to return to the classroom to take advantage of a flexible post-graduate experience. Some MALS students enroll in order to enhance professional prospects, others to seek personal achievement, but both groups are attracted by the MALS concept of an individually-designed degree that will allow advanced study of an academic subject for which there is no established existing local structure for graduate study. There are over 120 similar programs in the United States, and growth prospects are strong as universities respond to a vast increase in the population of working adults seeking both career enhancement and personal fulfillment.¹

As this degree exists to provide both enrichment and skills, coursework will be balanced between a sequence of required core competency classes and a broad range of flexible content offerings. While the program is open to students with BA or BS degrees from all disciplines, the core sequence will provide instruction and exposure to the central MALS competencies of interdisciplinary thinking, advanced writing and presentation skills, critical thinking, and research methods. During the program, every student will complete four MALS Core classes:

- MALS 600 (Core Seminar) will serve as an introduction to the concept of interdisciplinary graduate study by exploring a broad topic through various disciplinary lenses.
- MALS 650 (Graduate Research Methods) will introduce students to the skills necessary to explore a range of topics suitable for study in the program.
- MALS 700 (Graduate Writing, Documentation, and Presentation) will allow students to hone the composition and presentation skills necessary to complete a major project in their area of study.
- MALS 799 (Capstone Experience) will stand as the culmination of the program, wherein the student, with the guidance of an academic mentor, will complete a culminating project,

sometimes in the form of a traditional thesis, but sometimes in alternative (but equally significant) configurations based on the student's plan of study and academic interests.

With these four courses providing the foundation of the MALS degree, the remaining 18 hours will be assembled from a wide range of courses from across participating disciplines, taking advantage of new MALS-specific interdisciplinary seminars as well as extant courses Coastal Carolina University offers in support of established graduate programs in the humanities, education, business and sciences. Currently, Coastal Carolina University's College of Humanities and Fine Arts offers a regular rotation of graduate courses in Art, English, History, Political Science, and Music. Since many graduate arts and humanities courses currently offered as part of the Masters of Arts in Teaching have excess capacity, the addition of students pursuing the MALS degree would create enrollment efficiencies at no additional cost to the university.

ANTICIPATED PROGRAM DEMAND AND PRODUCTIVITY

Coastal Carolina University has extensive experience working with nontraditional student populations, and the demographics of our region suggest the program will address a demand and produce graduates. According to statistics compiled by the Association for Graduate Liberal Studies Programs, the average age of an MALS participant is 44 years old and most are over 50.ⁱⁱ These students are part of a national trend whereby older adults are returning to the classroom, some after their working careers are over, others having been inspired by noncredit coursework, to seek more rigorous academic experiences. In 2008 the *New York Times* reported that the number of graduate students older than 50 grew by 38 percent between 2001 and 2005, to about 173,000 from 125,000. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, that's "more than twice the rate of growth for graduate students overall."ⁱⁱⁱ

A survey of interest was given to current Coastal Carolina University undergraduates and students in the university's lifelong learning program. Out of 243 survey respondents, 221 undergraduates and 22 retirees, just over 50% indicated some level of interest in a hypothetical MALS program. With the current economic conditions, unemployment figures holding steady at ten percent, and increased demand for graduate credentials for those seeking first-time employment, many Coastal Carolina students seem to be considering staying in school long enough to earn a master's degree, thus increasing their marketability while also postponing the job search in hopes that economic conditions will improve. The survey revealed high levels of interest among students who are currently majoring in arts and humanities disciplines (e.g., communication, dramatic arts, graphic design, history, and music) as well as students in disciplines outside of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts (e.g., education, economics, marketing, management, and psychology). When asked what areas of study would generate the most interest in an MALS degree, respondents favored traditional liberal arts disciplines already housed in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts; world languages and cultures, politics, visual arts, history, and philosophy and religious studies generated the largest proportion of interest, with communication, theatre, English, and music also garnering interest. Of the retirees who responded to the survey, 40.9% expressed interest in the MALS degree. Typically, MALS participants from that demographic group are less concerned with enhanced employability.

Coastal Carolina University's service region already has all the ingredients for a successful MALS program:

1. A liberal arts university with growing graduate programs already in place and undergraduates who are interested in pursuing a master's degree.
2. An extensive record of providing educational opportunities to older students. CCU offers more than 300 Lifelong Learning courses, taught by 75 qualified instructors, to more than 1200 students each term.
3. A local population that skews older. The median resident age in Horry County is 38.3 years, whereas the South Carolina median age 35.4 years.^{iv}

Because this program "piggybacks" on existing resources (using current faculty and drawing on well-developed undergraduate programs), we believe it can be viable with very low enrollments, launched with only one new faculty

hire, and provide a fully-realized graduate educational experience to 15 new enrollees per year and a total of 25 FTE at any one time.^v

ASSESSMENT OF EXTENT TO WHICH THE PROPOSED PROGRAM DUPLICATES EXISTING PROGRAMS IN THE STATE

Winthrop University offers a Master of Liberal Arts degree that shares a number of elements with our proposed program. However, MALS-type programs draw from local populations and tend to attract a disproportionate number of part-time students, so it is unlikely a program established at Coastal Carolina University, 195 miles away from Winthrop, will “compete” with Winthrop’s long-established degree. There are six such degree programs established in the state of North Carolina. If North Carolina, with a population of 9,380,884, can sustain six MALS-type programs, it seems likely that South Carolina, with a population of 4,561,242, could sustain two.^{vi}

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM TO EXISTING PROGRAMS AT THE PROPOSING INSTITUTION

The administration of the MALS program, plus the four-course core, will be housed in the Dean’s Office of the Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts. Most of the “content coursework” in the degree will be drawn from the departments in the Edwards College, as team-taught and interdisciplinary courses already proliferate at the undergraduate level, with particularly close recent collaborations among the departments of English, Philosophy, History, Art History and Archeology. Courses developed specifically for the program will be given a “MALS” designation.

While the MALS core will be administered by the College of Humanities and Fine Arts, substantial portions of MALS degrees will be made up of graduate courses drawn from appropriate areas of university graduate study. While many specialized courses in professional and research programs such as Coastal’s Master of Business Administration and Master of Science in Coastal Marine and Wetland Studies degrees will be out of reach for MALS students due to prerequisite issues, MALS students could profitably participate in the humanities content courses that support Coastal’s M.A.T. program, as well as the introductory seminars in the Master of Writing Program.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM TO OTHER INSTITUTIONS VIA INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION

Given the program’s emphasis on flexibility, enrichment and individualized curriculum, we propose that the MALS program have a generous graduate credit transfer policy, students allowed to transfer up to nine (as opposed to the traditional six) credits of prior graduate work from other institutions into the MALS. Under no circumstances will an MALS degree be awarded without 21 total hours having been earned at Coastal. But this transfer credit policy will recognize the fact that some MALS students will have acquired graduate credits at other universities. Because of this policy, the MALS students will be excellent candidates for cross-institutional cooperation, and students who choose to enroll in short-term graduate study at other South Carolina institutions of higher education can find a “home” for their various credits in CCU’s MALS program.

TOTAL NEW COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPLEMENTING THE PROPOSED PROGRAM

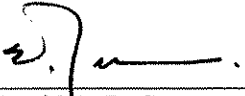
While the program will draw from existing faculty for coursework, those faculty will be displaced from a small portion of their customary duties in order to teach MALS classes, so we calculate the program will require the equivalent of .50 faculty FTE for a Program Director who will also be the instructor of record for at least one MALS course per year. Calculating annual professorial salary and benefits at \$72,000, the pro-rated cost of this additional hires will be \$36,000 per year, with the faculty member’s “excess” teaching capacity assigned to a department’s undergraduate needs depending on the hire’s expertise--i.e., assuming a four-course semester load, if the MALS Director were a historian, the faculty member would teach a MALS class (.25 FTE), administer the MALS program (.25 FTE) and teach two courses for the home academic department (.50 FTE).

Although library holdings are hard to measure vis-a-vis an interdisciplinary program, we estimate based on other recent graduate program development that Kimbel Library will require \$600 in immediate library collection

additions (dedicated to broad-based databases that are likely to help students in a wide range of areas), then \$2,000 annually for collection development.

We anticipate using extant administrative support staff for office duties related to the program. Nonetheless, an additional student worker at an estimated \$2000 per year will allow some routine office work to be completed without hiring additional benefitted professional staff.

We believe the total annual program costs (\$40,000) will be covered by tuition revenues as long as the program enrolls 15 students in any given term, with each student taking one class. Fifteen students each paying (450*3) per course will produce \$20,250 per term, \$40,500 per academic year.



Dr. David A. DeCenzo
President
Coastal Carolina University

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ⁱ <http://www.aglsp.org/about-1.html>, August 10, 2010

ⁱⁱ <http://www.aglsp.org/about-1.html>, August 10, 2010

ⁱⁱⁱ Larons, Christine. "Older and Wiser Students" *The New York Times*, October 23, 2008.

^{iv} <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/45/45051.html>, October 7, 2010.

^v Winthrop University's MALS program reports enrollments between 2006 and 2009 between 12 and 18 students.

^{vi} U.S. Census Data via <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>, October 7, 2010.