

UW-Madison: New online bachelor's in liberal studies adds to growing list of UW-Madison online degrees

Posted on Friday, Oct 8, 2021

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON — For Nicole Knutson, it was never if she would get a college degree, it was when. She loved academics. But after high school, about halfway into her first semester at UW-Madison, Knutson withdrew due to mental health challenges. She was convinced her dream of higher education had died.

Then she learned about UW-Madison Online. In 2020, at age 29, Knutson enrolled in the program to finish her bachelor's degree — fully online — while continuing to manage other life commitments. It hasn't been easy, but she made the dean's list her first semester back to college after a 12-year break.

"Our goal in expanding the program is to provide more of the access students like Nicole are looking for," says UW-Madison Chancellor Rebecca Blank. "Students who want to complete their degree but cannot be a traditional residential student should look at what UW-Madison Online has to offer."

UW-Madison is adding a Bachelor of Liberal Studies in Applied Social Science for a total of six UW-Madison Online undergraduate degrees available in Fall 2022, designed for people who have earned an associate degree or have some college credit. The new major gives students the opportunity to integrate academic study with applied activities from their workplace, internships, volunteer placements and career exploration coursework.

Housed in the College of Letters & Science, the applied social science program joins a slate of existing online degrees that all maintain the hallmark UW-Madison academic rigor: a BS in Personal Finance and a BS in Consumer Behavior and

Marketplace Studies from the School of Human Ecology and a BBA in Management, a BBA in Human Resources and a BBA in Marketing from the Wisconsin School of Business.

Eligible students can ask questions and learn more at online.wisc.edu.

“The College of Letters & Science is thrilled to offer a new degree and majors designed specifically to meet the needs of returning adult students to help advance their education and career goals,” says Letters & Science Dean Eric Wilcots. “The programs we are offering reflect the creativity and innovation of our faculty who are at the top of their fields and are pushing the boundaries of knowledge in all disciplines in L&S.”

Research identifies a large and growing market for a generalist “liberal studies” degree: Burning Glass data from 2021 reveals that in the State of Wisconsin between March 2020 and February 2021, more than 18,000 job postings required a bachelor’s degree in liberal studies and the social sciences.

The online Bachelor of Liberal Studies in Applied Social Science program was approved at the Oct. 8 UW System Board of Regents meeting. The regents also changed the existing UW-Madison Online programs to stand-alone degrees so that online programs can provide more flexibility and applicability for working adults.

Regarding her return to school, Nicole Knutson adds, “In my late 20s, I convinced myself that I would never get a degree. I had given up on my dream. I was so hesitant to come back to school because I felt like I was too old and it was past my time, but I am so glad that I did. I see myself becoming the person I always wanted to be.”