

General Education Requirements (Associate of Applied Science)

Revisions in Response to Feedback

- Increases the overall requirement to 18 hours from 15 hours.
- Adds a Theology menu that requires BIBL/BIBO 101.
- Moves the vocational formation (BIBV) courses focusing on the vocation of care and mission, kingdom, and creation of God into an option in the Humanities menu.
- Provides a description of the university request for the ACU Dallas team to explore the feasibility of a program at this level.
- Offers examples of other comprehensive universities offering applied associate's degrees.

Curriculum Proposal

Theology, 3 hours

BIBL/BIBO 101

Communication, 3 hours

ENGL/ENGO 111 Composition and Rhetoric

or

ENGL 106 Academic Composition

ENGL 006 Academic Composition Workshop

and

ENGL 107 Rhetoric and Persuasion

ENGL 007 Rhetoric and Persuasion Workshop

Humanities, 3 hours

BIBV 300-499

HIST 100-299

Life and Physical Sciences, 6 hours

Social and Behavioral Sciences, 3 hours

Total: 18 hours

University Context for Exploring an AAS

The university's mission and call from the Board of Trustees a decade ago to develop new models of ACU education have given us impetus to explore different types of programs, varying by modality, degree level, curricular size, and as part of corporate partnerships.

In the case of an AAS, we can offer a degree that provides immediate workforce advancement for people who do not have the means to leave work and attend school full-time. Bringing the Christian focus that infuses every ACU course to a group of students we wouldn't have reached otherwise is the heart of the university mission. It is the opportunity to change the career trajectory of individuals who largely cannot afford to start their education at the bachelor's level, and it aligns with our belief that Christian education is not merely for those with the flexibility and resources to pursue it full time.

Apart from the benefit to individual students, the university gains new streams of revenue from reaching new groups of students. Stable finances allows the university to continue serving current student audiences through its longstanding programs.

In addition to full degrees, the university has explored the trend toward microcredentials. A student who might not commit to a full degree program would commit to a shorter course of study like a certificate. Making these smaller curricular blocks stackable provides students the opportunity to build toward higher credentials if desired.

We are also seeing that corporate partnerships provide enrollment opportunities to attract groups of students instead of only offering programs that require individual recruitment. In these partnerships, the university provides programs that both offer educational opportunities for individuals, and the company benefits as employees advance in knowledge, skills, and perspective. Existing examples of these partnerships include Caris Life Sciences, the Texas Rangers, and the Region 13 Education Service Center. These programs so far include bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level students, and they share a thread of developing skills in high-demand workforce areas, as we're considering with the AAS.

The opportunity to build a partnership with a major regional hospital system comes at the intersection of pursuing our mission in a changing landscape, seeking new groups of students, offering stackable credentials, and building corporate partnerships. The system could choose to work with two-year colleges that already offer the AAS. However, they have pursued a conversation with a comprehensive university that could offer an AAS to help licensed vocational nurses (LVNs) become registered nurses (RNs), allow RNs to enter a BSN program, and offer a DNP program that would help bachelor's-prepared employees advance in and serve the system. The hospital system would prefer to work with a single partner — which would need to be a comprehensive university — to meet this goal.

Based on the opportunity to:

- reach a new group of students who would not pursue education with ACU otherwise,
- offer a program consistent with the high standards of the university that provides Christian perspective, and
- open an opportunity for corporate partnership that would help support ACU's ability to continue to offer its wide scope of programs,

the president and provost asked ACU Dallas to investigate the feasibility of training at the associate's level and develop a proposal for such a partnership.

Background of the AAS

While ACU is not encumbered by the specific regulations concerning degrees in the same way that public institutions are, the architecture provided by public institutions through legislation and guidelines by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board is especially helpful in understanding the purpose and function of the AAS.¹

The Texas Administrative Code Title 19.1.9.E§9.93,² originally adopted May 25, 2004, authorized state institutions to provide associate degree programs that “Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education.”³ According to the THECB Guidelines, these applied associate’s programs are “developed by an institution in close cooperation with business and industry to satisfy a need for timely and effective workforce education,”⁴ and must meet the SACSCOC requirements and standards. The key element of these programs is workforce development: ensuring that there are sufficient programs to provide training for jobs. Title 19 *et seq.* also requires that these programs — at public institutions — not exceed 60 credit hours unless there is a “compelling academic reason for the number of required hours, such as programmatic accreditation requirements, statutory requirements, or licensure/certification requirements that cannot be met without exceeding the 60-hour limit.”⁵

The AAS, then, is specifically designed to provide training, development, and credentialing to people who are either in the workforce or who are looking for a way into the workforce. For these reasons, the general education requirements are significantly different from the Texas Core Curriculum which requires 53 hours of general education, and usually nine hours in a field of study (Associate’s of Arts, Associate’s of Science, Associate’s in Arts in Teaching). Instead, students are required to take 15 hours of general education, which allows the student to acquire more hours focused on workforce skills necessary in the workplace.

Without appropriate educational access, existing workers are hampered in their ability to have the requisite skills required to participate in the current workforce. For many first-generation college students and adult learners, the barriers of accessibility, affordability, and accountability are prohibitive in their quest for social mobility.⁶ Higher education as a system has been strongly encouraged to provide adequate infrastructures that ensure adult learners receive postsecondary education.

The particular AAS program that ACU is considering addresses Texas’s acute shortage of nurses with an insufficient pipeline to address the workforce deficits.⁷ The AAS program is a means to address the critical needs in the workforce in ways that serve the communities in which the students earn the degree.

¹ The Associates of Applied Arts (AAA) is another workforce-type associate’s degree, but not one that we are considering at ACU at this time.

²[https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=93](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=1&ch=9&rl=93)

³<https://www.highered.texas.gov/institutional-resources-programs/public-community-technical-state-colleges/career-technical-education-workforce-initiatives/guidelines-for-instructional-programs-in-workforce-education-gipwe/>

⁴ Ibid., p. 6

⁵ Texas Administrative Code Title 19.1.9.E§9.93.b.3

⁶ <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497801.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/08/05/texas-hospitals-nurses-covid/>

AAS programs provide a means of living out ACU's mission and strategic vision for the student *and* the communities that they are being prepared to serve — especially for individuals who are unable to afford a full four-year degree upfront, or who need to take a more stepwise approach due to family obligations.

Isn't This for Community Colleges?

While most AAS programs are taught at community colleges (whose mandates include workforce preparation programs for local industries), comprehensive universities — including Purdue University, Indiana Wesleyan University, Texas State University, and the University of Tennessee — also offer these programs. In addition, branches of universities that offer programs especially designed for adult learners (Purdue Global, Maryland University Global, Indiana Wesleyan University Online) are serving a broad range of student needs, from AAS degree programs to doctoral programs, with programs that are designed to be stackable.

Why ACU?

ACU, even with the reduced cost of tuition for online students, is more costly and will be more rigorous than some other options that are available to students at community colleges. There are two considerations that will be compelling for students.

First, we are identifying industry partners who are willing to pay for a quality ACU education program for their workforce in order to credential and qualify those workers for more advanced jobs. This means that many of the students we plan to serve will pay little to no costs for their education out of pocket.

Second, most programs, even among community colleges, are not feasible for working students. We can combine our expertise in online course delivery with an industry partner's ability to provide hands-on clinical or experiential learning opportunities at the workplace. This means that students will be able to coordinate online courses and on-the-job training to advance their employability and earning power without driving to a campus, navigating childcare, and taking time from work. ACU is serving a need that we are uniquely positioned and equipped to serve.

The significant advantage of these degrees is that they provide more direct pathways to employment. For example, a person with a Certified Nurses Aid (CNA) certification can expect to earn approximately \$28,000 per year in the State of Texas. A person with a Licensed Vocational Nurse credential (LVN) can earn approximately \$46,500 per year. A person who earns an AASN and passes the NCLEX-RN, however, can expect to earn \$75,000+ per year.⁸

This provides a compelling advantage for students who need to support their families while also making progress toward a baccalaureate degree. It also increases their immediate earning power to help pay for the final two years of education upfront, rather than incurring additional debt obligations. This opportunity cost is prohibitive for many families who find themselves in need of ongoing employment.

⁸ Emsi, 22-04-21

Vocational Formation

Faith integration in ACU's online programs is the intentional and comprehensive focus on the intersection of faith, education, and context. Undergraduate students will engage in theological reflection rooted in Holy Scriptures and lived practice as they pursue their academic discipline resulting in a more grounded understanding of their identity, relationship to the world, and connection to the life and mission of God.

How is faith integration enacted for AAS students?

Along with scheduled coursework, students will experience faith integration through theological reflection on designated scriptures, spiritual practices & disciplines, and reflection essays that have the student's spiritual formation in view. Students will achieve this through two initiatives:

- 1) In every course, students will interact with a theological principle grounded in Holy Scriptures that engages their understanding of self, context, and God. Connected to each theological principle and engagement with Scripture, students will be invited into a "practice of presence" in every part of term and articulate their experience through a brief reflection essay due at the end of each 7-week term.
- 2) Students will be enrolled in three one-hour courses distributed throughout the program which seek to:
 - a) broaden their exposure and understanding of the story of Holy Scripture,
 - b) develop habits, postures, and disciplines that are rooted in the Christian tradition for the sake of spiritual formation, and
 - c) analyze and reflect upon the connection between a career in healthcare and the mission of God.

The courses are as follows:

Course #1 - Vocation & the Kingdom of God - This course is an introduction to the Kingdom of God as portrayed in the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus found in the Gospels. In addition, students will be introduced to the overall objective and trajectory of the vocational formation elements they will experience throughout the program. This course would be taken in the second part of term students are enrolled in the AAS program.

- **SLO #1:** Comprehend and recall key characteristics of the Kingdom of God as portrayed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- **SLO #2:** Apply and reflect upon spiritual practices that develop one's identity, presence in community, and life with God.

Course #2 - Creation & The Mission of God - This course is an introduction to the theological concepts of creation, hospitality, and incarnation as portrayed in the Genesis creation narrative. In addition, students will have the opportunity to reflect upon those vocational formation elements already experienced throughout the program as they begin to develop and concretize a cohesive vocational identity. This course would be taken at the mid-way point of the AAS program.

- **SLO #1:** Analyze and apply the theological concepts of hospitality, creation, and incarnation to present-day contexts, issues, and communities.

- **SLO #2:** Apply and reflect upon spiritual practices that develop one's identity, presence in community, and life with God.

Course #3 - The Vocation of Care - This course serves as a summative experience where students will be invited to reflect upon their overall engagement with the vocational formation elements throughout the program and create a "Rule of Vocation" that will outline postures, practices, and commitments the student seeks to engage moving forward in their vocational journey. This course will also provide a theological framework for understanding healthcare as it relates to the life and mission of God. This course would be taken in the final part of term in the AAS program.

- **SLO #1:** Apply and reflect upon spiritual practices that develop one's identity, presence in community, and life with God.
- **SLO #2:** Reflect and articulate upon the intersection of faith, identity, and vocation as it pertains to the field of healthcare.

The sequencing of the 1-hour courses and corresponding theological themes/practices of presence is as follows:

- Session #1: Finding God in the Ordinary (*Scripture*: Kingdom parables)
- Session #2: **BIBV 1-hour course: *Vocation & The Kingdom of God***⁹
- Session #3: God of the Table (*Scripture*: The table ministry of Jesus)
- Session #4: Restoration & Reconciliation (*Scripture*: Gospel healing narratives)
- Session #5: God Revealed in Weakness (*Scripture*: Death & Resurrection)
- Session #6: **BIBV 1-hour course: *Vocation & The Mission of God***¹⁰
- Session #7: Imago Dei (*Scripture*: Creation Narrative)
- Session #8: Hospitality (*Scripture*: Abraham & Sara)
- Session #9: Sabbath & Identity (*Scripture*: Exodus and Life w/God)
- Session #10: **BIBV 1-hour course: *The Vocation of Care***

⁹ The theological themes and practices of presence in sessions 1, 3-5 correspond with the course, *Vocation & The Kingdom of God*.

¹⁰ The theological themes and practices of presence in sessions 7-9 correspond with the course, *Vocation & The Mission of God*.