

# **“Individualized Study as a Tool for Retention and Graduation”**






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Individualized Study (INDS)  
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IMP Interdisciplinary & Individualized Major Program Network Conference

Thursday, March 16, 2023

**Purpose:** Share about our individualized program, especially our new track, Multidisciplinary Studies *in order to ask you for advice and reflections based on your own experiences*

**Agenda for this presentation:**

-  Sketch a background to the Individualized Study program at UMBC
-  Briefly describe the development of a new Multidisciplinary Studies track
-  Compare the traditional (INTS) and new (MDST) tracks
-  Current status (including student profiles)
-  Questions for IMP conference attendees

## UMBC

- ✿ Just over 50 years old (opened doors in 1966, with 500 students enrolled)
- ✿ 1969: “*Option II*” was one of 13 majors offered
- ✿ Fall 2022: 61 undergraduate degrees serve 10,625 undergraduates (and 3,470 graduate students)
- ✿ Division I athletics, Research 1 university
- ✿ In 2022 a new college president was appointed for the first time in 30 yrs!



## Individualized Study

- ✿ “*Option II*” changed name to “*Interdisciplinary Studies*” in 1979 and then “*Individualized Study*” in 2018
- ✿ INDS has now graduated approximately 1,400 students
- ✿ At our peak (academic year 1996) INDS graduated 42 total students
- ✿ In academic year 2021, we graduated 16 students.



# Where does INDS operate within undergraduate education at UMBC?

## College of Engineering and Information Technology

(4,060, 38%)

Computing, Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering

## College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences

(2,249, 21%)

Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math

## Undergraduate Academic Affairs (412)

Honors College

**Individualized Study (32)**

Specialty Scholarship Programs

Tutoring, "Transition" Programs *etc.*

Women's Center

Undergraduate Research

## College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

(3,591, 34%)

Psychology, Philosophy, English, *etc.*

School of **Social Work** (281)

Erickson School of Aging Studies (15)





no business school, medical school or law school?

***... INDS is the only degree-granting program not housed within a college or school.***

## Developing the Multidisciplinary Studies (MDST) Track




Designed to provide a path for students to complete a degree when they have *either* reached the end of their journey within a traditional major *or* left UMBC without having completed a bachelor's degree.

### ***Driven by:***

-  Internal analysis of retention/graduation  
*~70% 6yr IPEDS, with a “sophomore slump”*
-  External analysis of regional/national opportunities and needs  
*vast numbers exist, seeking online coursework & flexibility*



### ***Constrained by:***

-  sensitivity to the brand of INDS  
*“what will our alumni think?”*
-  sensitivity to the image of UMBC  
*perception that UMBC has worked hard for its emerging reputation*
-  University System of Maryland legislative restrictions:  
*to avoid a ~2+ yr process, MDST must be a new track (<15% different from current degree)*



**Solution:** Development of a Multidisciplinary Studies Track housed within Individualized Study, incorporating core curriculum and university functional competencies.



### **Phase I - Laying the Groundwork**

Initial discussions between *UAA Dean* and INDS in Spring 2021

Discuss and design within INDS during Fall 2021

Approved by *UGC* in Spring 2022, discussed at faculty senate and *UPD* meetings

Hired new lecturer middle of Fall 2022 semester



### **Phase II - Grassroot campaign with campus partners**

Launched within INDS in August 2022

Began conversations with *Finish Line* initiative, *advocates*, advisors across campus

Continue to meet with campus partners in spring 2023








## MDST and INTS: How are they the same?

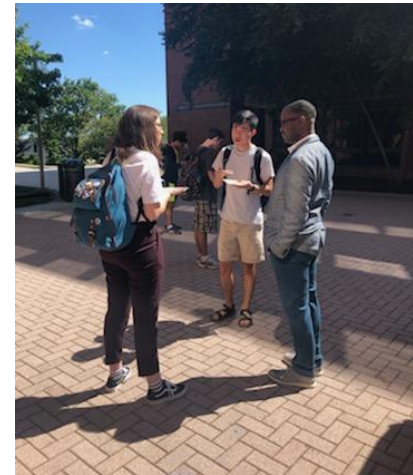
### Integrative Studies Track (INTS)

*Design your own degree from a blank canvas*

### Multidisciplinary Studies Track (MDST)

*Use what you have to complete a meaningful degree*

-  Offers BA or BS degree
-  Development of a cohesive major related to goals
-  INDS 330: Ways of Knowing
-  INDS 480 and 490: Capstone
-  INDS 410 (Internship) or INDS 430 (Special Topics)
-  Community of peers
-  Close, intensive advising



## INTS and MDST: How are they different?

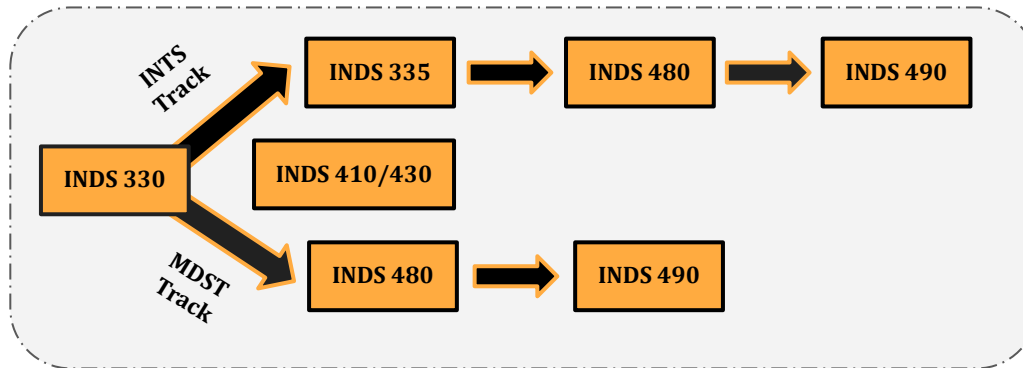
### Integrative Studies Track (INTS)

*Design your own degree from a blank canvas*

### Multidisciplinary Studies Track (MDST)

*Use what you have to complete a meaningful degree*

- ☘ INTS requires INDS 335: Degree Writing Seminar
- ☘ INTS degree plan reviewed by faculty committee, approved by Dean.  
MDST degree plan formulated in ongoing process.
- ☘ INTS: 2.5 GPA requirement, MDST: no GPA requirement
- ☘ INTS: 4 semester sequence of core courses, MDST: 3 semester sequence







That's 15% different!









# Where is MDST now?

-  50 referrals
-  27 meetings held
-  10 declared and working through core curriculum
-  8 new students projected to start in Fall 2023







|             | INDS 330      | INDS 480      | INDS 490      |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Fall 2022   | 4             | 0             | 0             |
| Spring 2023 | 7             | 2             | 0             |
| Fall 2023   | 8 (projected) | 7 (projected) | 2 (projected) |
| Spring 2024 | 10 (goal)     | 8 (projected) | 7 (projected) |

### Student Profile Example 1




-  Finish Line student with very few credits to complete degree
-  Been away from university for a few years
-  Needs degree to advance in career  
OR
-  Wants degree for personal fulfillment



### Student Profile Example 3

-  Student has earned over 100 credits
-  Change of major focus  
OR
-  Not close to completing their current or any other majors requirements
-  Can identify a few other courses to meet professional/academic goals

### Student Profile Example 2

-  Student asked to leave/could not complete declared traditional major
-  Has earned over 100 credits
-  Not close to completing another majors requirements



Dedicated faculty

Core Curriculum

## STRENGTHS

Intensive advising

Online-friendly courses

Low enrollment

Core Curriculum

## WEAKNESSES

Recognition/support from administration

Visibility on campus

# SWOT

Chances to build partnerships  
across campus

## OPPORTUNITIES

Still time to grow

"Stealing our students"

## THREATS

"Cheapens the 'UMBC brand'"

*What hard-won advice do you have for a program in our current situation?*

***(what questions would you ask us in order to provide advice?)***

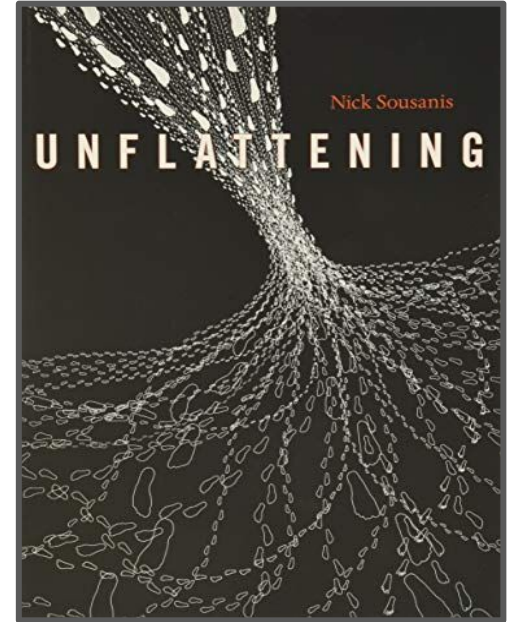
*Some examples of questions from us to you, as you reflect on your own IMP*

- 1) We initially feared becoming overwhelmed by potential enrollment; instead we are working hard now to find students - *does this surprise you, or is this similar to your experience?*
- 2) Do you experience strong negative AND positive reactions to your work from within your campus?
- 3) What are the pros and cons of a core curriculum sequence (inc. gateway)?
- 4) How do you help students find and trust a new program like this?
- 5) Do political sensitivities prevent you from seeking the same support that other new programs would expect/receive?
- 6) Do you find “online friendly” course options are important for degree completers, and if so then how do you navigate the rapidly shifting landscape here?

# Appendices

## INDS 330: Ways of Knowing

- ✿ Oldest component of our curriculum
- ✿ Small discussion seminar, co-taught by INDS instructors
- ✿ Topic: “claiming one’s education” as an undergraduate student
- ✿ Textbook: Unflattening (a PhD dissertation in graphic novel form published by Harvard University Press) by Dr. Nick Sousanis
- ✿ Collaborate in a group “concept mapping” exercise called Co-Navigator



# Functional Competencies at UMBC

*What are universal dimensions of value in a degree?*

## Cognitive functional competencies

- ✿ Oral and Written Communication
- ✿ Scientific and Quantitative Reasoning
- ✿ Critical Analysis and Reasoning
- ✿ Technological Competency
- ✿ Information Literacy

## Affective functional competencies

- ✿ Ethics and integrity
- ✿ Innovative leadership
- ✿ Teamwork
- ✿ Critical agency
- ✿ Social responsibility
- ✿ Resilience and adaptability
- ✿ Self awareness
- ✿ Intercultural development and perspective



## “My MDST degree”



Former major in Information Systems - MDST degree working title “Process Management”

**Functional competencies:** Scientific and quantitative reasoning; technological competence; leadership and teamwork

Q1: Why does MDST work for me?

- *MDST allows me to progress forward in the framework of my coursework and experience.*

Q2: What do I hope to do with this degree once I graduate?

- *I aim to work in a field that matches my coursework and experience in Process Management.*



Former major in Biochemistry - MDST degree working title “Science Communications”

**Functional competencies:** Scientific and quantitative reasoning; Oral and written communication; social responsibility

Q1: Why does MDST work for me?

- *I can focus on what I’m really interested in and prepare myself for the career I’m aiming for.*

Q2: What do I hope to do with this degree once I graduate?

- *After graduation I hope to use what I’ve learned to either work as a freelancer or join a media organization and work to raise scientific literacy and social consciousness in my generation.*