Frequently Asked Questions about CGS

General

What is CGS?

The College of General Studies (CGS) is a small, liberal arts college within BU, offering freshman and sophomore students a curriculum that satisfies the University’s general education requirements for humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and writing. As a BU CGS student, you explore these subjects through an interdisciplinary curriculum which emphasizes the connections between the courses. This approach equips you with the abilities to synthesize information from multiple perspectives, think critically, problem solve, and communicate effectively.

Upon completion of the two-year curriculum and several electives in other colleges at BU, you will continue to one of BU’s eight degree-granting undergraduate schools or colleges to pursue your major. The CGS curriculum provides the strong general education foundation—a critical part of the BU degree—upon which you then build a specialized field of study.

How many students are in CGS?

There are approximately 1,100 freshmen and sophomores total.

How big are the classes at CGS?

Our average class size is 25 students.

Who teaches the classes at CGS?

Only full-time faculty members teach our classes. We believe that direct and constant access to faculty is critical to your learning experience, especially at such an early part of your college education. Because of this, CGS does not have teaching fellows or teaching assistants. Faculty members teach their own classes, host their own lectures, and hold their own office hours.

Additionally, almost all of our faculty members have PhDs and work full-time at CGS—we do not have any adjuncts. Our faculty is comprised of noted scholars, scientists, poets, historians, biologists, philosophers, musicians, film experts, and professionals in many other fields who are masters at classroom teaching. Visit our Faculty Profiles to learn more about our faculty members’ interests and areas of expertise.

Will I be delayed in graduating from BU if I attend CGS?

No. Completion of our curriculum places you at the half way point towards a BU degree. You will take one elective each semester* in another BU school or college to explore and start accruing credits towards your intended major. That way, when you continue to one of the eight degree-granting colleges junior year, you’ll be taking courses at the same level as the peers in your major. Visit the Pathways to a Degree here.

Please note that degrees in Engineering (ENG), select programs in the College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College (SAR), and some physical science majors in College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) may take longer.
What is the January Boston-London program?

The January Boston-London program is a unique program at BU—it’s the only one that lets you study abroad during your freshman year. You begin freshman year in January with a semester in Boston, and then study abroad in London for six weeks, completing freshman year in late June. Whether in Boston or London, courses are taught by CGS faculty members, and classroom material is reinforced by experiential opportunities such as trips to museums, historical sites, and theatres.

The January Boston-London and September programs merge to continue the CGS core curriculum together sophomore year.

The CGS Core Curriculum

What do people do with a liberal arts education?

What can’t you do with a liberal arts education? It enables you to explore a wide range of disciplines while also developing specialized knowledge in a particular field of study, preparing you to meet the challenges of today’s world. While it’s important to specialize in a certain subject area(s) through your major, we believe that the broad, general education part of your studies provides you with the skills that transcend any industry: critical thinking, effective communication, problem-solving, and collaboration.

It turns out employers value those skills just as much as we do. Recent research shows that leadership, the ability to work in a team, strong written and verbal communication skills, problem solving skills, and analytical skills are among the top qualities that employers look for in college graduates (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2014). Our alumni regularly report back that CGS’s interdisciplinary team approach has enabled them to excel in their professional lives, spanning the fields of business, medicine, law, education, communications, entertainment, and more.

What is the CGS core curriculum?

Our core curriculum satisfies the University’s general education requirements for humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and writing. It’s specially designed to take a cohesive and interdisciplinary approach, which emphasizes the relevancy of each subject and allows the courses to reinforce each other. This approach enables you to retain and apply what you’re learning more effectively than is typical in a curriculum in which the courses are unrelated. At the end of the CGS program, you participate in a Capstone project, working with peers to research a real-world, timely issue, and propose a comprehensive, practical solution.

To view the specific courses in our curriculum, please click here.

Am I able to pick specific courses within the CGS core curriculum?

Our core curriculum is a set menu of related, interdisciplinary courses. This approach to general education fosters deep learning and creates a cohesive, impactful educational experience.

Are there differences between the January Boston-London program and September program curricula?
Only during freshman year. The January Boston-London program includes more field experiences, plus the semester in London for a global perspective. The two programs merge to continue the CGS core curriculum together sophomore year.

**How many semesters is the CGS core curriculum?**

The CGS core curriculum is four semesters total, completed during the freshman and sophomore years.

**Can I receive credit for advanced placement (AP) classes or coursework completed at another college?**

Yes, you may receive credit if your AP scores or college coursework grades meet University standards. Read more [here](#).

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**Transition to the Other BU Schools and Colleges**

**Will I be able to explore the different majors and take classes at other BU schools and colleges while at CGS?**

Yes—in fact, you are required to take courses at BU’s other eight schools or colleges. Like many of our students, you will likely choose electives to explore academic disciplines or professional areas in more depth and to start accruing credits towards your intended major.

**After CGS, do I have to re-apply into one of the eight degree-granting colleges at BU?**

No, you have guaranteed continuation into one of the eight degree-granting schools or colleges at BU. When you complete CGS with a GPA of 2.0 or higher, and have taken appropriate electives, you simply declare your major(s) for the junior year.

See the [Pathways to a Degree](#) for details.

**What BU schools and colleges do CGS students graduate from?**

CGS students graduate from each of the eight degree-granting schools or colleges at BU. The most popular schools that students continue on to are the College of Arts and Sciences (30 percent), College of Communication (30 percent), and the School of Management (20 percent).

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**Notable Features of CGS**

**Will I be able to study abroad if I go to CGS? Are there study abroad programs specific to CGS?**

Yes. We believe global education opportunities unlock exciting, enriching and invaluable experiences. In fact, we built in the study abroad experience as a required component of the January Boston-London program.

We have CGS [study abroad programs](#) that satisfy certain core curriculum requirements. With programs in both London and Shanghai, we offer you the chance to study the humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences. Our programs are open to students who have completed
their freshman year, and they are offered in the summer and fall semesters. You can also choose to study abroad during your junior or senior year. In fact, many CGS students do both!

**What is the team system?**

At CGS, we organize our classes, students, faculty, and advisors using a team system. Teams, similar to cohorts, are comprised of about 80 students who share the same faculty throughout the entire year, which enhances the teaching, learning, and social experiences by fostering a robust learning community.

Your faculty and advisor team meets weekly to closely coordinate the curriculum and ensure interdisciplinarity. This kind of team meeting and combination of perspectives is highly unusual at any college, let alone a large research university.

**Who will be my academic advisor?**

Part of what makes CGS unique is our academic advising program: we have a full-time advising team dedicated entirely to help you navigate, explore, and pursue a variety of educational experiences. Our advisors are here to assist with major exploration, course selection, and career path research. They also lend support as you transition to college, become familiar with the many resources across campus, and get to know BU’s policies and procedures.

In addition to meeting with you regularly, our academic advisors meet with the faculty teams to understand what’s going on in your courses so that they can best advise you on academic and career matters.

Read more about our academic advising program and meet our team.

**What academic services does CGS offer?**

Our Robert W. Emery Writing Center is located right in the CGS building, which is a comfortable space for you to meet with faculty members to strengthen your writing and critical reading skills. Whether it’s guidance on how to develop a strong thesis, or reviewing documentation styles, it’s a great place to receive individualized support.

In addition to CGS-specific academic services, the University also offers support services, such as the Educational Resource Center.

**What are the culture and environment like at CGS?**

Our College maintains a strong sense of community. Our faculty members and staff not only want to know your name, they want to know your strengths, personality, and aspirations. And it shows. Faculty members are regularly asked for letters of recommendation—even if they had the student many years ago—because of our vested interest in getting to know our students so well.

Our classrooms and hallways are filled with energetic conversation and enthusiasm. As students, you get to know your peers well through our team system, and develop friendships that last beyond your two years at CGS.
Everyone is hard-working. You’re busy balancing rigorous classes with pursuing passions outside the classroom; and your faculty members are teaching their own courses, grading their own papers, and publishing their own work all at the same time.

Can I pursue research opportunities while at CGS?

Yes—we encourage it. As part of a world-renowned research university, CGS offers you the chance to connect with faculty members and work on research as early as your freshman year. You can receive academic credit by taking advantage of our CGS directed study offerings, or perform research as part of BU’s Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program. Either way, it’s a great opportunity to partner with our faculty members who are leaders in their respective fields, gain research experience, explore your interests in greater depth, and potentially travel around the world and become published. Read more about our research opportunities.

What are some of the student activity and leadership opportunities specific to CGS students?

There are several CGS-specific student activity opportunities among the 450+ student activities groups across campus.

- Like volunteering? Club GiVE (Get Involved in Volunteer Experiences) is dedicated to community service around campus and in the greater Boston area.
- Interested in serving as a student leader? The CGS Student Government Association aims to connect the student body and faculty and caters to the interests and needs of the CGS community.
- Active in international issues? The World Affairs Forum organizes lectures and master classes on an array of relevant, international topics.
- Passionate about the arts? Our Film Lovers and Philosophers Society offers a series of films and discussions with fellow film enthusiasts. Or, submit your short fiction, poetry, photography, or drawings to be featured in The Chimearid, our literary magazine.
- Looking for a strong CGS community in the residence halls? You’ll find an active residence life community in our Gilbane House, which is home to 40 current and former CGS students— all undergraduates— as a part of the University's Specialty Community Residence Program.

To read more, visit our CGS Student Organization page.

What other student activities exist?

Lots! BU has more than 450 student groups, spanning interest areas such as recreation and athletics, service and justice, academic and professional interests, art and performance, student governments, Greek life, special interests, and many, many more. Explore the Student Activities website here, and if you don’t see your favorite group, start it when you get here!

Where do CGS students live?

As BU students, you live throughout the campus in the various residence options. Additionally, our Gilbane House is home to 40 current and former CGS students— all undergraduates— as a part of the University's Specialty Community Residence Program.
Admission

How do I apply to CGS?

You can apply directly to CGS following the standard application process through undergraduate admissions. Boston University accepts the Common Application. Applicants who apply to CGS will be considered for both the September and January CGS programs.

I've been admitted. What other resources should I check out as I make my decision?

Congratulations! Now that you’ve had the chance to explore our website, we invite you to check out our student portal, CGSNow, to get a better sense of current students’ experience. Visit our Facebook page, and follow us on Twitter. And, as you know, websites can only take you so far—there’s nothing like actually coming to campus to sit in our classrooms, talk to our students, and experience the culture first-hand so we invite you to schedule a visit and join us for an Open House.

Also be sure to check out the Admissions website, as they have a lot of information that can help you make sure BU is the right place for you.