

2020 BAM Student Survey Results

INTRODUCTION

In June of 2020, a short survey was sent to students admitted to a Combined Bachelor's and Master's (BAM) degree pathway program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The purpose of the survey was to elicit early feedback from students to understand their motivations for entering into a pathway program, their level of satisfaction, any challenges they are experiencing, and how we can improve the program.

Utilizing Google Forms, a 12-question survey including closed and open-ended questions was sent to all BAM pathway students (how many students?). The survey was completed by a total of 27 BAM pathway participants from 13 of BAM pathway programs.

RESULTS

Demographic Information:

Respondents were in any of 10 BAM pathway programs:

20% - Mechanical Engineering BS/MS

20% - Second Language Studies BS/MS

12% - BS/MS Civil Engineering

12% - BA Ethnic Studies/MEd Educational Foundations

12% - BA Psychology/MA Educational Psychology

8% - Global Environmental Science BS/Master of Urban & Regional Planning (MURP)

4% - Computer Engineering BS/Electrical Engineering MS

4% - Economics BS/MS

4% - Electrical Engineering BS/MS

4% - Travel Industry Management BS/MS

We asked about the current status respondents in the BAM pathway program. Respondents indicated 48.1% were recently admitted; 37% completed the bachelor's degree and are now classified as a graduate student; 11.1% were undergraduate students taking double-counted courses; and 3.7% had graduated with the master's degree.

Which best describes where you are in the BAM pathway program?

27 responses

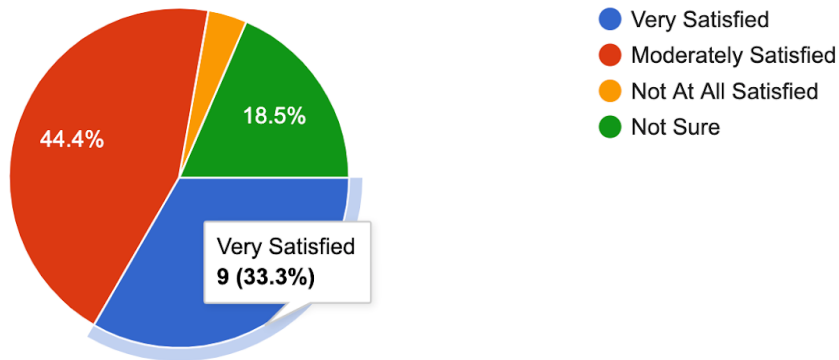


SATISFACTION

The percentage of respondents who indicated that they are either moderately or very satisfied with the BAM pathway program was 74.7, whereas 18.5 percent were “not sure”. One person (3.7%) indicated that they were not at all satisfied.

What is your level of satisfaction with the BAM pathway program?

27 responses



ADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPATING IN THE BAM PATHWAY

The most endorsed advantage of BAM participation was to earn a degree more quickly (88.9%) with saving money by double-counting credits (85.2%) and paying for those credits at the undergraduate tuition rate (77.8%) were the top selections. Being able to take graduate courses as an undergraduate was also endorsed by 77.8% of respondents and maintaining momentum because there is no break between the undergraduate and graduate program was selected by 66.7% respondents as the top five advantages.

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES DESCRIBING ADVANTAGES OF THE BAM PATHWAY

The comments about the advantages mirror the selections respondents made to the list of advantages provided in the earlier question. Completing both degrees faster and with savings relative to tuition were

commented on more frequently. The pathway also being a means to achieve personal goals and ambitions was also included.

- I wanted to save money, and get my degrees faster.
- I can better save for further graduate education, and the rigor of graduate work at the undergraduate level reflects well on the challenges I have accepted, overcome, and accomplished during my academic career.
- I am an ambitious student with big career goals. These advantages will help me achieve my goals.
- These are advantages because they are beneficial with financing my education and pursuing my higher education track.
- Undertaking this program for my own personal ambition.
- As mentioned on the checklist above, graduating earlier with less cost will be a huge advantage for every student, including me.
- as an international student, i want to be able to reduce my costs as much as possible and be done so i can go and seek employment
- As someone taking out student loans to help finance college, I'm able
- It saves me time and money as opposed to spending the regular 2 years
- I really enjoyed being challenged with graduate level courses. Taking these classes made me more curious about the MA program.
- I am the primary caretaker for my grandmother and paying my way through college has not been easy. I am grateful that I do not have to pay for two years of graduate school, I am only paying for one. I am also very intrigued by how quickly I can obtain my Masters. I did not want to have to be in school more years than needed.
- I am trying to avoid student debt as much as possible and get out into the workforce sooner.
- It was nice to just finish it all in one go, I feel like if I took a break between my BA and my MA then I would have never continued.
- I don't have money for school and I am old.
- Provides a good opportunity to better optimize and take advantage of my time while in undergraduate program.
- It makes it quicker for me to get out of school.
- It makes it easier to get a good degree related to my undergraduate studies
- This program has made a post-graduate degree more accessible to me both financially and practically. Without such accessibility, this path may not have been an option.
- I am currently in the last 8 months of my VA benefits so it's helpful to be able to use my benefits for 2 programs while I have time to use them.
- Earning a graduate degree more quickly would allow me to work less years of professional experience to take the PE exam. I also need to take a few courses to stay full time and my scholarships earned in undergrad will be able to pay for them.

WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF THE BAM PATHWAY?

An open-ended question asked what is the best part of the BAM pathway. This question prompted more of a variety of responses by the respondents. Aside from similar comments in earlier questions about completing both degrees quicker and the financial benefit, responses here included enjoying the challenge of master's level coursework, starting that coursework earlier, and relationships with faculty. Some respondents specifically commented appreciating being able to work with faculty and the difference between graduate coursework and undergraduate coursework. The following responses were received:

- **It allows you to take graduate level courses with and finish your master's degree earlier**
- **Getting to work with the amazing professors from both departments.**
- **The people that I get to work with.**
- **Overlapping classes and the expedited pathway!**

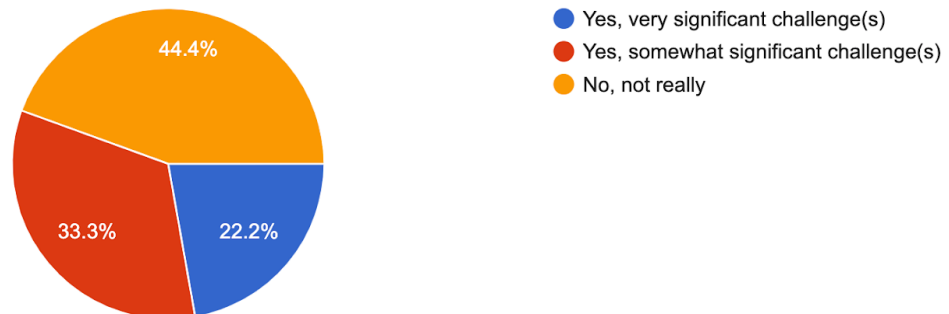
- Save money, and completing a Masters at a faster rate.
- Being challenged with topics and details on a MA level. Interacting with the MA and PhD students and learning from them. High expectations from the professors and being held accountable.
- The program I am entering
- Being able to challenge myself and slowly integrate into the MA. Also saving money!
- Starting grad school early
- Take courses ahead of time
- The double counting courses are great and helpful. But in my opinion, waiving the GRE test and recommendation letters are the best part of this program. I think it simplifies the Master degree registration process a lot. Unfortunately, I only saw the BAM program email after taking GRE test and asking professors for the recommendation letters.
- It is a 1 year masters.
- It's a faster track, and saves money with double counted courses.
- Finishing quicker.
- So far, I look forward to working with a staff and faculty who I already know well. I feel that I am getting something out of my college experience that is far greater than what I had imagined when I first came to UH.
- Graduate work is my favorite, despite it being at least 10x more difficult than undergraduate classes. I feel challenged to think beyond what I already know, and my graduate peers often have interesting points that I never considered in my own readings of texts. I also enjoy the smaller class size and longer class time as this allows for more engaged discussion rather than feeling like the class is on life support just to go home/eat/socialize/beat the parking tickets/etc. I think graduate work has allowed me to better plan for the types of schooling I would like to pursue following my experience as well.
- Another aspect is the relationships with faculty. As an undergraduate, I only knew faculty because I spent time at the department office. I also did well in my courses, and my professors remembered me. Very few undergraduates can say the same because they had similar interactions, they went to office hours, they were working on faculty-mentored projects or had taken multiple classes with a faculty member. At the graduate level, faculty members are easier to speak with, especially if you want their input on the course readings, your statements for law/graduate schools, and for conversations on emerging topics in the field. It seems they are more open to graduate students, and I have found that many do want to help and watch students succeed.
- It's new and sounds pretty enticing to get students to enroll into UH's graduate program.
- The opportunity to obtain a higher level degree in a condensed amount of time.
- Saving time and money :)
- not having to take a break after undergrad
- The opportunity to take graduate courses as an undergraduate student.
- The ability to get a head start on a graduate degree.

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE BAM PATHWAY

In response to the question which asked whether they had encountered challenges in the BAM pathway program, 44.4% of respondents said, “no, not really”, whereas 33.3% said, “yes, somewhat significant challenges, and 22.2% said, “yes, very significant challenges”.

Have you encountered challenges in the BAM pathway program?

27 responses



The particular challenges experienced by 65% of respondents included logistical issues (e.g. registration and advising). Workload (taking both undergraduate and graduate coursework) was reported as a challenge by 40% of the respondents. A sense of belonging or inclusion was reported as a challenge by 30% of the respondents. Of note, one respondent reported experiencing the following challenges: class availability and quantity, and the inability to utilize STAR.

HOW CAN THE BAM PATHWAY PROGRAM BE IMPROVED?

An open-ended question asked how the BAM pathway program could be improved. Several comments focused around logistical issues related to course offerings and the schedule, advising, and promotion of the BAM pathways. Of note were comments related to the emotional aspects of the BAM pathway and helping students to feel supported..

The following responses were received:

- **Perhaps buddy systems such as peer pairs and not just advisors.**
- **If they offered a Masters in Ethnic Studies, that would be awesome!**
- **Offering more overlapping graduate classes.**
- **A little more guidance would be helpful. As a SOEST undergrad, we always had academic advisors available. I may just not know, or have missed the opportunity of advising at the graduate level, but this would be very useful.**
- **I think it is important to create a more cohesive program BA/ MA/ program where students get to interact with each other regardless of their status.**
- **unknown**
- **Include more double counted courses or allow the credit if the course was taken prior to acceptance**
- **Offer more courses that double counts during your undergrad year**
- **I think the BAM pathway program would definitely increase other students' interest in Master degrees. So, I think this program should be better promoted.**
- **Have a better variety of classes.**
- **Offer more classes in both fall and spring, and try not to overlap class times with other required courses.**
- **Perhaps hire a BAM advisor for each department/degree that has a BAM program. Someone who is knowledgeable in both graduate and undergrad studies in that major, the BAM program overall and specifics for that department, and someone who can advise these students much more carefully. I understand that I am a part of the first cohort for the SLS BAM program and there were many wrinkles to iron out, but I think**

that a designated BAM advisor would be efficient in easing the transition for any discipline.

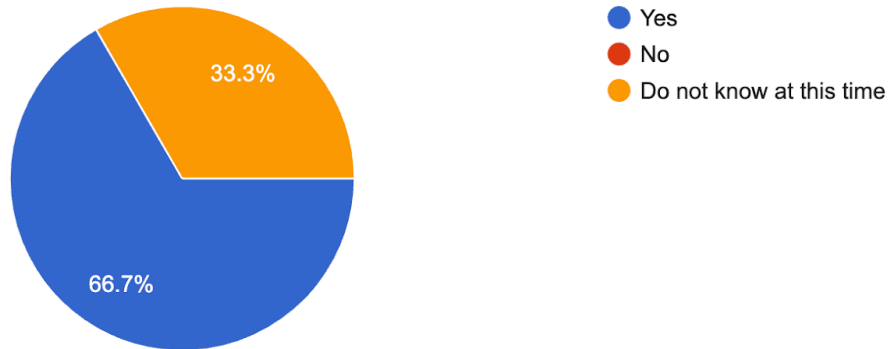
- Perhaps more representation in department emails. For example, in an email about graduate student housing, a simple note like “this does/does not apply to BAM students...”
- I think this varies depending on department, but if students had a fair or event on the various pathways, there might be more interest. Even if the majors offered aren't necessarily the student's primary field, having the advantage of a combined degree program offers a student competitive advantages in graduate school applications/job hunting, academic rigor, and the opportunity to take on a challenge few can take on because of department selectiveness/personal issues/etc.
- For students who are juniors or seniors, I think this program should be a bit more flexible for upper division students whose majors recently roll out a program. I was this student as my department rolled out the program as I had very few credits remaining. I scrambled to find a minor in order to extend my program, and this inadvertently led me to taking 18 credits (6 graduate, 12 undergraduate). This was a stressful semester that may be mitigated if there was some planning for upper division students who do not have the luxury of planning for four years, or who are in majors that roll out BAM programs toward the end of the college career. BAM should be an enticing option for students as a way to enhance their academic careers or to prepare for work.
- Foundation of the program is key to it being successful. There needs to be more professors in the engineering department in order for more classes to be offered. There is no program if there are no professors and no classes.
- Better clarification on which courses are available and when. Better clarification on the specific restrictions of this program.
- I don't feel I can really talk about this since I am not officially a BAMA student yet. Maybe by the end of next semester, I could tell something more about this :)
- create sites dedicated to outlining double counted classes, advantages, etc. clearly
- N/A
- This comment is not relevant to me because the program was only offered once I had already started my senior year, so I cannot 100% say this would help. With that being said I believe it would improve the number of potential students if a restructured undergraduate schedule that includes the BAM was provided (like a check sheet similar to the current check sheet); this would help students decide if it is something they would like to pursue. I think that this would greatly improve the ability for a student to meet the criteria of the program and be at the proper starting point to be able to pursue the program.

WOULD YOU CHOOSE THE BAM PATHWAY PROGRAM IF YOU COULD START OVER AGAIN?

The responses to this question shows that over 66.7% of the respondents would pursue the pathway

If you could start over again, would you choose the BAM pathway program?

27 responses

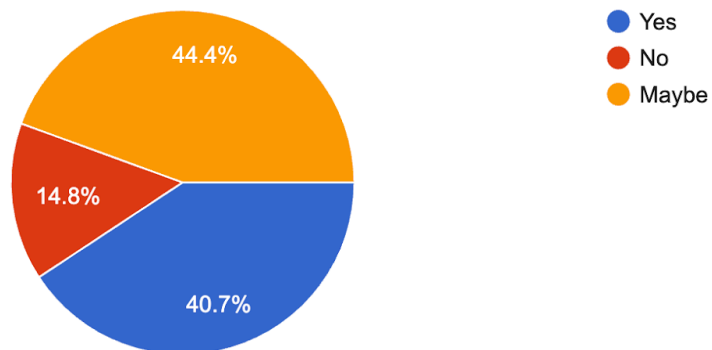


WOULD YOU HAVE PURSUED A GRADUATE DEGREE WITHOUT THE BAM PATHWAY OPPORTUNITY?

The responses to this question shows that over 40.7% of the respondents would pursue a graduate degree without the pathway, 44.4% responded “maybe” and 14.8% said they would not.

Would you have pursued a graduate degree without the BAM pathway opportunity?

27 responses



CONCLUSION

The BAM student survey had a limited number of respondents and nearly half of them were recently admitted. The timing of the survey likely impacted the response rate (June of 2020). We plan to run the survey again during the regular term and will compare results. Overall, there was a fairly high degree of

satisfaction with the BAM pathway program. Students report the advantages of time and cost savings as predominant. Some reported being pleased to work with “amazing professors” and “being challenged”.

That said, over half of the respondents reported having somewhat or very significant challenges. These challenges include logistical and advising problems. Some had difficulty accessing advising. Others expressed concern about the process to apply. Another concern expressed was clarification on which courses would be available and when and the desire to have more options and to minimize course conflicts with other required courses. Some expressed challenges regarding the workload and the transition to graduate coursework.

It’s important to point out that despite the challenges expressed by some respondents, none of them would *not* choose the BAM pathway if they could start over again (and two-thirds said they would). Interestingly, nearly 15% of the respondents said that they would NOT have pursued a graduate degree without the BAM pathway opportunity. Thus, this is a significant initiative that contributes to individuals achieving the goal of obtaining an advanced degree who would otherwise forego the opportunity.

There is work to be done regarding the advising and support of BAM pathway students as well as the scheduling of double-counted courses to ensure they do not conflict with required baccalaureate coursework. We continue to have more BAM pathways approved, both internal to an academic unit as well as across schools and colleges and will continue to assess the effectiveness of the BAM pathways from the student’s perspective as well as the academic units’ perspective. Likewise, we remain committed to continuous improvement of this program.

Some next steps:

- Revisit BAM academic plan and course availability
- Revisit promotion of BAM pathway programs - incoming new/transfer students, current students, and web presence
- Consult with BAM pathway programs and their advisors RE: promotion of the pathway program and advising at both the undergraduate and graduate levels
- Consult with BAM pathway programs and how they are socializing their BAM students
- Continue to survey BAM pathway students and include survey of BAM pathway faculty and staff.