

Report: Interdisciplinary Studies

Interdisciplinary programs are increasingly important for understanding complex and multifaceted questions and issues in the world today. For example, addressing environmental problems is enhanced by grounding in the natural sciences, policy making, history, planning and other disciplines. Understanding gender identities and issues means engaging with literature, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology and biology.

Broad-Based Goals

- to formalize and strengthen the support for interdisciplinary programs, special majors, minors, and individual interdisciplinary team-taught special topics courses
- to enhance the health of current interdisciplinary programs, as well as create the structures by which new opportunities for interdisciplinary study can emerge in response to evolving needs and timely issues
- to have the University recognized as a regional leader in burgeoning fields, such as Middle-Eastern Studies, and to develop a reputation as an institution committed to teaching and research in particular areas, such as sustainable development or Civil and Human Rights. In other words, interdisciplinary programs will signal who we are, what we do and what we value.
- establish an Office for Interdisciplinary Studies and Services with a faculty advisory board and faculty director to facilitate the needs of the constellation of interdisciplinary studies and programs

Establishing specific (rather than general) interdisciplinary research and teaching departments, majors, certificates and centers can help UMW raise money from donors and through grants as well as attracting students interested in particular kinds of issues.

The University should make changes that will facilitate interdisciplinary teaching, including team teaching; supporting existing interdisciplinary programs and new program development, especially those in areas that will help define and articulate the University's values and goals, by ensuring funding and resources and supporting grant writing; and addressing the issues that emerge with interdisciplinary programs, including hiring and evaluation.

The University has interdisciplinary programs in multiple forms: as free-standing departments, as majors in departments, as certificates. Each of these forms raises issues of resource allocation, the ability to define the content of the program, and the distribution of responsibility, work and credit. The University should grapple with these issues and establish guidelines for future programs to minimize predictable problems.

Furthermore, the University needs a strong, dynamic advocacy apparatus, which might have a physical presence on campus, such as an Interdisciplinary Center or Office, or might be a group

of interested faculty, such as an Interdisciplinary Board or Committee. This entity would be set up to assist students who are interested in pursuing an interdisciplinary program already available on campus or those who wish to create their own. It would also support, enhance and advocate for faculty who are involved in interdisciplinary program development, teaching, or research.

Specific Goals

We should also promptly make changes that do not require any new institutional forms or require little funding. These changes include facilitating interdisciplinary teaching, including team teaching; supporting existing programs and program development, especially those in areas that will help define and articulate the University's values and goals; ensuring funding, supporting grant writing, and providing resources; and addressing the issues that emerge with interdisciplinary programs, including hiring and evaluation.

specific objectives and recommended timetables

To increase support for interdisciplinary studies, the University should make the following policy changes in the next 1-3 years:

- Change the faculty handbook language regarding promotion to associate professor (6.3.2.3) from “contributed to his or her discipline” to “contributed to his or her scholarly field,” and to full professor (6.3.3.3) from “recognition within the discipline” to “recognition within a scholarly field.”
- Include language in the Faculty Handbook related to the university's support for interdisciplinary service, research, and teaching.
Enable the cross-listing of classes on Banner.

The following changes will require more institutional changes, including changes in our institutional culture or establishing new organizational forms. They should be completed in the next 1-5 years.

- Create an appropriate faculty committee or charge an existing one with establishing criteria and processes for evaluation and promotion for faculty engaged in interdisciplinary teaching, research and service. Faculty who are housed in specific departments, but also work in interdisciplinary contexts need to know that their work will be recognized and rewarded in their evaluations. Faculty who teach, conduct independent studies, oversee theses, and act as administrators for interdisciplinary programs need formal avenues to receive credit for their work and service to the institution.
- Create an appropriate faculty committee or charge an existing one with the responsibility of establishing guidelines for interdisciplinary hires. This committee should consult with members of recent interdisciplinary hires for input and involve members from relevant departments.

- Establish administrative policies for allocating resources that take interdisciplinary issues into account. Departments with faculty who engage in interdisciplinary teaching or service need additional resources (adjuncts, hire-behinds) from the administration. If the University is going to encourage interdisciplinary efforts, it needs to offer resources.
- Ensure appropriate administrative support of team teaching. This includes the cross-listing of courses, obtaining hire behinds for each faculty member involved, and no longer penalizing departments for a shortage of seats. (See appendix for IDEAL model.)
- Create board or committee or institution to help with the development of and promotion of interdisciplinary programs on campus. This would include the following: identifying interdisciplinary areas that will reflect the University's priorities and help create a strong reputation for the school; developing partnerships with the community (local, regional, and global); obtaining funding and budgets for interdisciplinary programs; promoting interdisciplinary programs in conjunction with admissions, academic services, and university advancement.
- Charge department chairs and other administrators to work with the above-mentioned apparatus to help meet the interdisciplinary mission of the University.

Other goals will take longer to meet and will depend on how the University as a whole develops in the coming years. However, we hope to see the following completed in the next 3-8 years:

- Put inter-disciplinary graduate programs in place and support our existing ones that rely on a network of departments working towards a common goal. That goal is to support graduate students who are undertaking an interdisciplinary research topic and ensuring that faculty receive proper recognition for their work.
- The creation of interdisciplinary programs that encourage faculty and student research and praxis in areas that reflect our values and priorities and that meet local and regional needs.

Possible future goals

Establish an Office of Interdisciplinary Services which would be both flexible and well-supported as a university structure.

- The Office requires a faculty director, advisory board, secretarial staff, a budget, and access to budget decisions at the university level.
- The flexible structure we envision must respond to faculty needs dictated by current Interdisciplinary programs established as majors, minors, certificates, and centers at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Likewise, the Office would respond to faculty proposals for new partnerships and courses that may be either repeatable or single occurrences.

- Thirdly, the Office would respond to student requests for pursuing interdisciplinary experiences, and publicize interdisciplinary opportunities so that all students are made aware of the potential for integrated studies offered at the University. (For example, when UMW accepts a student as a Master's student, the student could design an interdisciplinary course of studies).

The Office of Interdisciplinary Services would provide a focal point for activities as a physical space and structure which can more easily serve as a host center. Interdisciplinary Studies would have more visibility on and off campus. As a host center IDS can have its own identity stated through mission statements, goals, and learning objectives.

The Office of Interdisciplinary Studies can also support IDS centers recognized by the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Under the right circumstances an interdisciplinary center can become a source of income.

Income from outside the University can be used to hire support staff, such as a director, who in turn can coordinate faculty and student research grants and external partnerships. Much of the day to day work of running the center would be in the purview of the director.

The advisory board would include the Provost, Deans, some chairs of departments, faculty and students. The Director and Board would consider proposals, assure quality control and assessment, advocate for funding through grants and university budget resources, and facilitate interdepartmental concerns related to faculty loads, credits, cross-listings, hire-behinds and promotion and tenure criteria.

The Director would represent interdisciplinary programs at the Executive Council and at other administrative sites of decision-making. Over the next few years, this body or unit would also be charged with working with the administration in order to facilitate the hiring of interdisciplinary positions by laying out hiring procedures and promotion and tenure guidelines. The interdisciplinary body or unit would also work on developing a procedure for recognizing cross-disciplinary service to the university and team-teaching that would follow AAUP guidelines on faculty loads. Support for faculty preparation, in the form of training, course development, and workshops would be provided. In some cases, an overhaul of the major might be necessary—this could offer the Office of Interdisciplinary Services an opportunity to teach differently and team teach across the campus.

As part of the need for the Office of IDS to establish its presence and serve as a model for interdisciplinary structures, we propose initial recurring courses which may serve as a model for other teaching innovations.

- A course for Seniors named IDEAL for Interdisciplinary Dilemmas in Ethics and Leadership, would be serve as a context within which interdisciplinary studies can occur. Not owned by any particular department, the course can secure a place for team teaching around faculty designated topics. At the senior level, we can predict that students are at a

different intellectual stage of critical thinking, and we can bring the students back into the community with their fellow students from other disciplines.

Specifically a course like IDEAL, is a container for two faculty to put their expertise to work on a compelling ethical/social dilemma. Other courses might be Freshmen Seminars. : for example a course on Writing Studies aimed to raise consciousness about writing, writing choices, the politics of writing, and being writers. Another possible example is the development of a minor in Education Studies, with courses team-taught by Education and Sociology, Philosophy, Arts or Psychology, Such a minor could be developed for faculty who want to do research and community development projects like working with children of immigrant and military families in the region, responding to the minority achievement gap, and advocating for the treatment of minorities in public schools. The interdisciplinary focus is clear: How do human beings learn? What influence does society or culture have on the learning process? Furthermore, students who want to prepare for work in social services, agencies, arts agencies, etc., should have the opportunity to minor in Education Studies with broadened career goals in mind whether they seek teaching certification or not.

a brief summary of where UMW is vis-à-vis interdisciplinary studies

The University needs to assist students who are interested in pursuing an interdisciplinary program already available on campus or those who wish to create their own.

Furthermore the University needs to support, enhance and advocate for faculty who are involved or want to become involved in interdisciplinary program development, teaching, or research.

Currently housing interdisciplinary programs in departments is problematic because a nominally interdisciplinary program ends up being overseen by a single discipline. One discipline sets the curriculum, advises the students, etc. American Studies has begun to break out of that mold, but we would strongly object to new programs following the model of IA or Environmental Science and would like to see those two overhauled some day.

As stated above, some members of the committee propose an Office of Interdisciplinary Services which would be both flexible and well-supported as a university structure. The Office requires a faculty director, advisory board, secretarial staff, a budget, and access to budget decisions at the university level. Others believe that much of this support can and should come from changes in existing policies and institutions and that the University should cultivate interdisciplinary programs that raise its profile and represent its values.