

INTERDISCIPLINARY TASK FORCE COMMITTEE REPORT

SPRING 2013

Submitted by Anita Gonzalez, Committee Chair

Committee Members:

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**Executive Summary of the Interdisciplinary Task Force
Submitted by Committee Chair and Provost Fellow Anita Gonzalez**

The Task Force concluded at a meeting on held on April 16, 2013 that there are multiple types of interdisciplinary activities undertaken by faculty members and students on campus that engage students in closely-mentored, critical thinking and problem solving activities. Many faculty members are enthusiastic about interdisciplinary learning - despite dissatisfaction that emerges from confusing administrative channels and a lack of communication among faculty members engaged in interdisciplinary work. Based largely on these issues, faculty members who engage in interdisciplinary activities feel unrecognized, unrewarded, and vulnerable within the tenure and promotion process.

The Committee suggested the following ACTION ITEMS to support and enhance interdisciplinary learning at the university:

- 1) Appoint a Dean or Head of Interdisciplinary Learning to manage interdisciplinary learning initiatives across campus. One clear result of the group's activities was consensus that there should be a distinct administrative structure for support of interdisciplinary programs with lines of power and communication clearly articulated. The Committee prefers a Dean to lead the interdisciplinary learning programs because he or she would be able to clearly advocate for faculty and budget lines. The Dean would be able to supervise new jointly-appointed or purely interdisciplinary faculty and support their tenure and promotion. The Dean would also be responsible for allocating funding to interdisciplinary programs. He or she would supervise and maintain facilities as well as administer staff members associated with interdisciplinary programs. ***The committee suggests that this prospective Dean also manage and supervise the Liberal Arts Learning initiatives since many of these initiatives are also interdisciplinary activities.***
- 2) Dedicate a discrete budget to support interdisciplinary programs and learning initiatives. Each school and/or the Provost office could contribute to a collective budget line that will support programs, courses, and faculty members engaged in interdisciplinary work.
- 3) Dedicate a space for interdisciplinary activities that will allow faculty members to converse and plan across disciplinary boundaries, consolidate administrative support services, and provide advising and support to students involved in interdisciplinary programs.
- 4) Develop a set of procedures for proposing and implementing team-taught courses and compensating faculty members who teach them.

The Interdisciplinary Task Force Committee would like a direct response from the Provost about which recommendations will most likely be implemented by the College.

Final Report

A committee of 10 faculty members from The School of Fine and Performing Arts, The School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the School of Science and Engineering and the School of Education met for six sessions to conduct surveys, collect recommendations and plan appropriate solutions for enhancing, consolidating, and marketing interdisciplinary activities on the SUNY New Paltz campus. The group was divided into 4 subcommittees that focused on interdisciplinary 1) courses, 2) faculty, 3) programs, and 4) administrative structures. Each subcommittee conducted research, and then led discussions with the entire subcommittee about each of the four areas. Recommendations of the committee are as follows:

General Recommendations

There is a need for intellectual and physical space to accommodate interdisciplinary campus initiatives. Interdisciplinary majors and minors, as well as faculty interested in engaging in collaborative projects or courses need space outside of their departments where they can plan, research, and advise students.

There is a need for an administrative structure outside of the academic schools that can organize, administer, assess and advocate for interdisciplinary courses, programs, and faculty. The committee recommends that this be a Dean who is fully empowered to make hiring and budget decisions and who is able to effectively negotiate with other Deans for faculty lines and educational resources. The Dean could perhaps also manage the Liberal Arts Education initiatives.

Structures

The “Structures” committee researched interdisciplinary administrative structures at comparable private liberal arts institutions, within the CUNY system and within the SUNY system (with a particular focus on comparable university colleges). After discussion, the committee proposed the following solutions for consolidating and promoting interdisciplinary work at SUNY New Paltz through administrative functions. These recommendations are based upon a perceived need for faculty and students interested in interdisciplinary work to collaborate across traditional school and departmental structures.

- 1) The committee defines interdisciplinary teaching and research as a focus on solving complex research questions through a range of disciplinary approaches. They recommend that there be dedicated space (both physical and virtual) to support Interdisciplinary work on campus. A dedicated interdisciplinary “center” would provide a space for faculty to meet to develop new courses and programs, initiate grant applications, confer with colleagues, promote student and faculty interdisciplinary research, and advise students.

- 2) The committee recommends that there be a designated Dean or Director of Interdisciplinary Studies who would:
 - a. Manage and assess Interdisciplinary programs
 - b. Market or barter with Deans and Chairs for resources
 - c. Receive request for Faculty teaching time releases for interdisciplinary courses and then allocate resources (ex. 15 teaching units for LA &S and 10 for S and E)
 - d. Administer Professional Development Funds for Interdisciplinary activities
 - e. Administer space for interdisciplinary people to get together
 - f. Oversee secretarial staff that supports interdisciplinary programs
 - g. Promote and market interdisciplinary programs
 - h. Provide support for interdisciplinary grant initiatives
 - i. Supervise Interdisciplinary faculty and mentor them for tenure and promotion.

- 3) The School or Center of Interdisciplinary Studies could also serve as an “incubator” for new courses and programs and outreach to older or “worker students” for their continuing studies.

Models for Interdisciplinary Centers or colleges are:

SUNY Oswego’s Interdisciplinary Programs and Activities Center (IPAC)

http://www.oswego.edu/academics/colleges_and_departments/departments/interdisciplinary/ipac.html

The Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies at Grand Valley State University in Michigan

<http://www.gvsu.edu/cois/>

Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at University of Southern Indiana

<http://www.usi.edu/libarts/cids/>

Programs

The Programs Subcommittee met with the Program Heads of several Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors on March 1st and 21st. These two meetings were the first time that Interdisciplinary Program Heads had gathered to discuss common successes, program challenges, and administrative support structures.

Faculty who attended the sessions included: Ligia Aldana, Shafiul Chowdhury, Kathleen Dowley, Anita Gonzalez, Joel Lefkowitz, Bruce Millem, Heather Morrison, Yoni Schwartz, Pat Sullivan, Michelle Woods. The sub-committee also received email responses from Dan Werner and Stella Turk.

Discussion in both meetings responded to five questions:

1. Considering your program or interdisciplinary programs in general, what contributions do interdisciplinary programs bring to our campus?

Responses in this section indicated that students in interdisciplinary programs are more likely to engage in closer mentorship with faculty members through focused research and capstone courses. Some programs reported 100% employment rates for students. The programs create a sense of community for students (especially in area studies programs) and allow students to respond to global trends and cutting edge research. Their learning is broader and more synthetic.

2. What are some examples of the most telling feedback you have received from students and faculty about your programs?

Program heads are passionate about their programs and students appreciate the intellectual rigor of interdisciplinary pursuits. The close mentorship within these programs closely match graduate studies programs and provide for “hands-on” exposure to research opportunities. There is a sense of validation of self and belonging within some area studies programs. Many of the students find jobs in the areas in which they studied.

3. What are some of the limiting challenges to interdisciplinary programs on our campus?

Challenges include vague hierarchies, inequities in resources and lack of incentives for participation in the interdisciplinary programs. Some programs have limited core faculty and crucial courses are taught by adjuncts. There is no sense of physical community for faculty involved in the programs. Some programs depend upon individual departments for support. There is a lack of secretarial and administrative support and no physical home for programs. Team teaching on campus is particularly difficult to support. Programs are dependent upon the charisma of the heads to draw and retain students.

4. What are some practices, procedures, or policies that would help your program to grow in the ways that you hope to see it thrive?

Program heads believe that clarification of bureaucratic lines and a stamp of approval from the Provost would help the programs; they need someone to advocate and make decisions for the programs. Programs also need a physical home or space and a lounge or common area for visibility. Course releases for entry level courses and for program director’s service is essential for continuing productivity within the programs. Memos of Understanding would help to clarify the status, roles, and responsibilities of interdisciplinary faculty. There is a need for administrative secretarial services to support the programs and a website to promote them. Program heads would also like to have reduction of their departmental advising load so that their service as advisors to interdisciplinary programs is acknowledged and compensated.

5. Are you satisfied with the visibility of interdisciplinary programs like yours on our campus? Why or why not?

Program heads express a lack of visibility because of the voluntary nature of their service. Publicizing the programs happens when they are not teaching, researching, or serving the university in other ways. They could use help in creating brochures and advertising interdisciplinary minors and majors

Faculty

The subcommittee on Faculty assessed the impact of interdisciplinary work on faculty involved in research, teaching, and course development. They determined that interdisciplinary work holds promise for institutions low on resources but it demands a lot of faculty time. Because it requires a synthesis of disciplines and understanding the language of multiple disciplines, faculty members need time to read primary literature, think over and shape ideas, design experiments, learn new skills, play around in the lab, and trouble shoot.

Research has shown that people who most often are most creative and want to make changes are also people with least power (junior faculty, women and people of color). Therefore the idea of a new dean for interdisciplinary studies and a physical space where faculty and students involved in interdisciplinary work can meet, is very appealing.

Their interpretation of this research is that vision for new scholarship come from the bottom of the pyramid and therefore need advocacy from the upper administration. Anecdotal stories reveal that junior faculty members are sometimes ostracized by the department when they show an allegiance to interdisciplinary programs or initiatives. They must work double-time to demonstrate an allegiance to both the department and to the interdisciplinary program or area.

The subcommittee interviewed Deans about the hiring and status of interdisciplinary faculty across campus (see the appendix). In summary, faculty hired under contracts that cross departments usually receive a Memorandum of understanding that defines their roles and responsibilities. Most of these faculty members are currently in LA and S, and particularly in Women's Studies. Many faculty members are core participants in interdisciplinary programs but do not have an MOU. Without a split line or an MOU it is actually more difficult to participate in interdisciplinary initiatives because participation depends upon the support of Deans or Chairs.

After consulting with Deans of LA and S, F and PA, Business, and Science and Engineering the subcommittee learned that new interdisciplinary faculty lines are proposed by departments through Chairs and that their loads and assignments are determined by discipline-based Chairs. Faculty participation in interdisciplinary work may be based upon course enrollments within disciplines. They are evaluated using the same criteria as uni-disciplinary faculty. One Dean suggested that deans, chairs, and interested faculty engage in focused dialogue and planning around priority areas for interdisciplinary content courses, and programs, including looking at models for administratively facilitating new faculty.

Distribution channels for information about interdisciplinary work needs improvement. The campus community learns about interdisciplinary programs/courses/research through word of

mouth, advising, or student interest. There is limited access to student list serves to distribute information about interdisciplinary programs/courses/research.

After discussion the subcommittee determined that the following incentives would encourage faculty members to become involved in interdisciplinary work:

- Summer salary
- Teaching load reduction
- Offer a rotating course release
- Support for a professional grant consultant who could assist faculty with the budget, institutional perspective, assessment procedures, proofreading or review of grant applications.
- Professional development funds to travel to conferences or workshops
- Faculty mentoring.
- Industry funding of some interdisciplinary initiatives.
- A physical space where faculty and students could come together

Courses

The subcommittee on Courses used a variety of techniques to assess the number and types of interdisciplinary courses offered on campus by faculty. First, the subcommittee drafted a query which was sent out to the “fac-staff” list, asking individuals who have done interdisciplinary teaching to identify themselves and answer a series of questions. Secondly, each member of the subcommittee contacted one of the major entities on campus involved in offering or planning interdisciplinary programs: Academic Advising (FIGS & FYIs), Honors (Interdisciplinary Honors Seminars), and the Liberal Education Committee (currently planning an interdisciplinary first-year seminar) to discuss how activities and plans for interdisciplinary work could best be coordinated across constituencies.

Finally, the subcommittee hosted a forum on Wednesday, April 10th, at 3:30 p.m. that was co-sponsored by Honors and the TLC. 20 faculty members attended the session. Working in small groups they answered three questions about the rewards and challenges of developing and teaching interdisciplinary courses on campus. *Faculty who attended the forum suggested that a uniform mechanism for financing and compensating co-teaching activities is essential.*

The subcommittee believes that interdisciplinary classes should ideally integrate different disciplines, not simply expose students to multiple disciplines within one class and they identified a range of courses at SUNY New Paltz that fulfill this criteria:

- Team-taught interdisciplinary courses (through Honors)
- Linked courses in FIGS and FYIs (two separate classes with two different professors but the same students and some coordination re: material offered)

- Interdisciplinary courses taught by a single professor in a single department (such as Geography, History, Education)
- Summer onsite courses taught by two instructors from different disciplines.
- Courses in interdisciplinary programs like Women's Studies, Asian Studies, Black Studies, Latin American Studies, if you consider your course to have spanned more than one discipline.
- And there may be other types of courses we are not yet aware of

One of their recommendations is to identify and track the interdisciplinary offerings at New Paltz.

Appendix A: Report of the Programs Subcommittee

The Programs Subcommittee met with the Program Heads of several Interdisciplinary Majors and Minors on March 1st and 21st. It should be noted that this was the first time they had met together.

In attendance:

Michelle Woods	Kathleen Dowley	Bruce Millem
Eve Tuck	Pat Sullivan	
Anita Gonzalez	Heather Morrison	
Yoni Schwartz	Shuipul	
Ligia Aldana	Joel Lefkowitz	

Email responses: Dan Werner, Stella Turk

Discussion in both meetings centered around answering five questions:

1. Considering your program or interdisciplinary programs in general, what contributions do interdisciplinary programs bring to our campus?

- Increased access to employment and graduate opportunities
- Creates a sense of community among students and faculty
- Involves students in scholarly activity and undergraduate research
- Broader and more synthetic learning
- Better student to professor ratio (especially Honors) and one-on-one relationship with specialists in the field
- The programs speak to diversity and expanding fields of knowledge , i.e. Area Studies educate about a part of the world that is too big to ignore
- Responsive to world trends and globalization (i.e. Asian and Latin American Studies which focus on areas of the world where potential jobs may be offered)
- Responsive to global and local issues and communities
- Creates a synergy among/between disciplines

2. What are some examples of the most telling feedback you have received from students and faculty about your programs?

- Passion about the programs by the program heads
- Prepares students for graduate level work, close match with graduate work
- Intellectual rigor of the programs

- Opportunity for students to work “hands-on” with faculty on research
- A sense of self and belonging – provides a way to negotiate a place in US culture
- Validation of themselves and a sense of home – connections through migrant services
- Jobs in the area in which they studied (Central and Latin America)

What are some of the limiting challenges to interdisciplinary programs on our campus?

- Hierarchies are vague – they don’t know who to go to for what (need a cheat sheet)
- No incentives for participation.
- Inequities in resources for programs (no operating budget for many)
- No course releases
- Lack of core faculty (i.e a specialist in interdisciplinary studies)
- Some programs are primarily taught by adjuncts
- Few meetings and sense of physical community also for the faculty involved.
- The programs don’t have a community and are dependent on individual departments for support
- Mixed reactions from individual departments toward interdisciplinary studies (drain on budget, faculty, time)
- Most have no operational budget: voluntary work by minor heads
- Dependence on cross-listed courses
- Not all have core or capstone courses (or difficulty staffing them)
- Advising and advertising programs – extra work burden
- Outreach – students don’t know about the programs
- Lack of secretarial and administrative support
- Programs are dependent upon the charisma of the heads in to draw and retain students and faculty
- No physical home
- Still no institutional way to arrange for team teaching

What are some practices, procedures, or policies that would help your program to grow in the ways that you hope to see it thrive?

- 1) Stamp of approval from a Provost. Clarify the bureaucratic lines of control. Have someone to advocate and make decisions for programs
- 2) Home or space for the programs. A lounge or a common area and a director’s office and visibility for the programs
- 3) Entry level courses and money for course release so that they can be taught
- 4) Memos of Understanding with oversight for faculty members (and possibility that this be retroactive)

- 5) Funding for conferences and research abroad to tempt faculty to teach on program
- 6) Course releases for faculty and for heads of minor programs
- 7) Administrative assistant
- 8) Website
- 9) Cheat sheet with information and contacts for minor / major heads
- 10) Advising training: letting faculty know about majors / minors
- 11) Faculty lines in interdisciplinary fields
- 12) Program coordinators get reduction in advising load and are assigned advisees in their programs

Are you satisfied with the visibility of interdisciplinary programs like yours on our campus? Why or why not?

- Lack of information about minors and majors: due to voluntary nature of positions (minors)
- Could use help for creating brochures and advertising minors / majors
- Website – at least to inform faculty about programs going into advising
- Lack of physical visibility: space and (in some cases) no visibility at majors' fair
- Lack of central administrator to advocate for the programs

Appendix B: Report of the Courses Interdisciplinary Forum on Wednesday April 10th

INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM

Wednesday, April 10, 2013

3:30-5:00 p.m.

Attendees: Ligia Aldana (Latin American & Caribbean Studies), Mary Beth Collier (Academic Advising), Megan Ferguson (Chemistry), Glenn Geher (EVOS), Liz Hester (Communication Disorders), Nancy Johnson (English), Ro Millham (Secondary Ed/Science), Matt Newcomb (English), Cy Mulready (English), Jeffrey Reinking (Biochemistry), Jonathan Schwartz (Asian Studies), Hamilton Stapell (History), Pat Sullivan (Honors), Vick Tromanhhauer (English), Andrea Varga (Theatre Arts & EVOS), Wendy Vierow (Special Programs), Michelle Woods (English); plus Anita Gonzalez, Julie Gorlewski, and Susan Lewis from the Interdisciplinary Working Group.

1. Introduction – Susan Lewis & Julie Gorlewski
2. Report on committee charge/progress – Anita Gonzalez
3. Three groups convened to discuss questions, then reported out on these questions:
 - A. What are the strengths of interdisciplinary teaching to be fostered?

Strengths of interdisciplinary courses/teaching reported out by the groups included:

For teachers --

The ability for individuals to teach their own areas of expertise
Professors can work with new and diverse populations
Fosters new research projects/problems; enriches scholarship
Brings together people in different fields
Encourages innovative teaching
New disciplines may be the deep disciplinary work of the future
Professional skills connect with each other

For students --

Students benefit from new and multiple connections
Team work models real world experience
The ability to draw on different strengths from students
with different majors/backgrounds
The ability to work with different styles of learning and
multiple intelligences
Models flexibility and expansiveness as better human traits than rigidity

For students and teachers --

Ability to call upon guest lecturers and use experts on campus

Students and teachers are forced to think “outside the box”

Exciting for students and teachers

For college as a whole—

Enriches curriculum, faculty, students & (illegible)

B. What are the problems to solve?

Problems that the groups felt needed to be addressed were:

- Scheduling team-taught or linked courses, including FIGS
- Freeing staff to teach these courses/departmental push-back
- Invisible service
- How to divide responsibility clearly (MOUs)
- Working with students with different knowledge bases
- Meshing methodologies
- Lack of resources
- Lack of compensation (for development and teaching)
- Difficulty of arranging team teaching, esp. multi-disciplinary
- Selling interdisciplinary programs, courses, and FIGS to students

C. What are the actions to take?

Specific actions suggested by the groups included:

- Creating a simple mechanism for how to do team teaching as part of one’s regular workload
 - Providing compensation for preparing interdisciplinary courses
 - Providing supplemental funding for supplies for interdisciplinary courses and programs
 - Money specially earmarked for interdisciplinary efforts
 - Creating more interaction between interdisciplinary faculty and potential faculty
 - A clear organizational structure for interdisciplinary efforts – programs, teaching, courses
 - Institutional/administrative support for faculty teaching ID courses
 - Incentives for participation in interdisciplinary initiatives
 - Training and faculty development (especially adjunct and part time)
 - Hiring interdisciplinary lines
- D. Next steps: space, budget line, coordinato

Appendix C: Ideas for a Proposed Center for Interdisciplinary Learning

Mission:

The Center for Interdisciplinary Learning engages students and faculty members in educational activities that use multiple disciplines to advance learning. It supports and advocates for activities that enhance learning by bringing critical thinking and problem solving processes from multiple disciplines to a topic or concern. The Center serves as a “common meeting ground” and support center for programs, faculty and students involved in interdisciplinary pursuits.

Center activities might include:

- Hosting meetings for interdisciplinary faculty
- Coordinating open meetings or networking session for students from interdisciplinary programs to discuss ideas.
- Writing grants for interdisciplinary initiatives
- Sponsoring visiting interdisciplinary scholar activities
- Mentoring and advocating for Interdisciplinary Faculty personnel actions
- Imagining and implementing new interdisciplinary new initiatives
- Coordinating a digital humanities interest group

Two Year Plan

Year 1

- Develop and publish a website describing current campus interdisciplinary activities
- Use the TLC for program gatherings and meetings. Available times are 4:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Wednesday and Friday mornings.
- Implement clear procedures for funding streams. Establish a budget line that is funded by the individual schools that benefit from Interdisciplinary faculty, courses, and programs
- Establish procedures and places for printing and posters for all interdisciplinary programs
- Clarify a site for secretarial and/or administrative support for interdisciplinary programs
- Create memos of understanding for those faculty members that need them
- Organize meetings of program heads
- Establish a Digital Humanities Interest Group

Year 2

- Identify and furnish a space for an interdisciplinary center
- Identify an Interim Director for the Center
- Create an advisory board for the Center
- Program interdisciplinary guests and speakers
- Establish a “fellows” program at the center
- Establish a Digital Humanities “Lab”
- Writes for grants and external funding to support its initiatives