

Interdisciplinary Studies at WSU

Report to A2C2 – 11/6/2013

Multidisciplinary Workgroup Task Force

Background

- Multidisciplinary Workgroup Task Force established Spring 2012 semester
- Charge: to investigate multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary programming at WSU
- 5 faculty members and 2 Deans
 - Bill McBreen, Dean, College of Nursing
 - Harold Ornes, past Dean, College of Science and Engineering
 - Tamara Berg, faculty, Women's and Gender Studies
 - Joan Francioni, faculty, Computer Science
 - Theresa Waterbury, faculty, Educational Leadership
 - Kimberlee Snyder, faculty, Business Administration
 - Lynn Ornes, past faculty, Nursing

Definition

- “Interdisciplinary studies” encompasses scholarship and pedagogy engaged in work at the edges of traditional disciplines but where some level of integration among different disciplines is involved.

Benefit of Interdisciplinary Studies

[From 2011 AAC&U Report *What Works in Facilitating Interdisciplinary Learning*]

As the result of intentional interdisciplinary learning experiences, students will be able to:

- Recognize disciplinary strengths, processes, limitations, and perspectives.
- Purposefully connect and integrate knowledge across disciplinary boundaries, in the context of novel situations.
- Be agile, flexible, reflective thinkers who are comfortable with complexity and uncertainty, and can apply their knowledge to respond appropriately and positively.
- Understand that other factors—cultural, political, ethical, historical, and economic—must be considered when addressing the complex problems of this century.
- Understand the universal nature and deep structure of science, as well as the relationship of STEM disciplines to other disciplines.
- Prepare for future learning as lifelong learners in their careers and as citizens.
- Apply their capacity as integrative thinkers to solve problems in ethically and social responsible ways.
- Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively with others within diverse cultures and communities.

Existing WSU Programs

- Stand-alone programs
 - HLA – Health Leadership Administration
 - PSM – Professional Science Masters
- Theme-based programs
 - CAST – Child Advocacy Studies Training
 - WAGS – Women's and Gender Studies
 - Sustainability minor
 - Gerontology
- Problem-based components
 - i-Courses (Fa12-Sp13 pilot as part of Next Chapter program)
 - Imagine Cup
 - Informal collaborations among faculty/student groups

Existing Supportive Strategies and Resources

- Internal grant programs to explore new ideas and promote faculty-development opportunities.
- Collaboration and buy-in across departments and colleges that was supported by Deans in the past (including funding, reassigned time).
- Colleagues working on their own across departments.
- Having connections both on campus and in the community.
- Having outside funding.

Challenges for New Programs/ Initiatives

1. No defined mechanism for oversight of interdisciplinary curriculum and/or courses, including but not limited to
 - Responsibility for determining stakeholders and their interests
 - Faculty rosters
 - Ensuring integrity of ongoing curriculum and/or courses

Challenges (cont)

2. No defined mechanism for fostering innovation involving multiple disciplines, including but not limited to

- Funding levels and support
- Structure for decisions on which programs to support
- Accountability of developing programs
- Support for faculty to participate
- Protection of existing departments
 - replacement of reassigned faculty for departmental courses
 - institutional scans and workload credit apportioned fairly

Challenges (cont)

3. No defined mechanism for faculty in different disciplines to collaborate together in the development and delivery of new curriculum and/or courses, which leads to problems around
 - Lack of trust in colleagues and WSU administration
 - Communication problems within and across units
 - Intellectual property questions

Solutions Needed That Will

- Support developing programs and initiatives
- Foster new avenues for interdisciplinary innovation
- Work with and not in competition with existing Academic Units
- *Specifically, need strategies and infrastructure to*
 1. *Support innovative program and component experimentation and development*
 2. *Support collaboration across disciplinary programs*
 3. *Provide continued support for permanent programs*
 4. *Define incentives and expected responsibilities for faculty supported for innovation projects*

Questions to A2C2

1. What are issues you are seeing related to
 - a. existing interdisciplinary programs and/or courses?
 - b. to new programs and/or courses?
2. What are ideas you have for better supporting interdisciplinary programs and/or courses at WSU?