Start a 'Section' of AIS

The need for sections

Members of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies have long observed that fields claiming to be “inherently interdisciplinary” are often studied in ways that are less than fully interdisciplinary. Rarely is their study self-consciously and intentionally interdisciplinary, and even less often is their interdisciplinarity informed by the professional literature on interdisciplinary studies. In a way, perhaps, this situation should not be surprising. Most scholars are primarily interested in the subject matter of a field, not the process by which it is studied, and interdisciplinary studies are distinguished by process not by subject matter. Conversely, even AIS members deeply interested in IDS process would find it useful to exchange ideas about interdisciplinarity with colleagues who share a common interest in a particular topic or domain.

The AIS Board of Directors would like to address this situation by providing a venue for members to discuss the nexus between process and subject matter in their particular field by forming “sections” within the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies. A section could focus on a geographical area such as American studies, a social category such as women’s studies, a time period such as nineteenth century studies, an aspect of the planet we inhabit such as environmental studies, an abstract category such as wicked problems, a type of text such as literary...
Schindler: Newell Award

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colleagues have had opportunities to participate and interact with participants from other colleges and universities. As AIS Board conference liaison, Roslyn's work has been especially helpful to faculty and administration of colleges and universities who have volunteered, or been coaxed with her gentle persistence, to host a conference. Her carefully developed instructions and active participation in preparation for conferences have allowed a variety of colleges to showcase their programs by hosting an AIS conference.

Roslyn served a term as president of AIS and she has been a member of its Board of Directors for twenty years. Importantly, she has served on the AIS Leadership Team for six years.

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AIS: Start a section

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studies, etc. Sections will give their members an opportunity to discuss how interdisciplinarity should play out in that particular context.

The benefits of sections

Sections will give members an opportunity to draw other specialists in their field into AIS—specialists who show openness to thinking about the interdisciplinarity of that field. Environmentalists, for example, will be able to discuss the intersection of environmental issues and interdisciplinary in section-sponsored sessions at AIS conferences, and do so with others who have some expertise in environmental studies. Those discussions can take place at a more advanced level than they now do, and continue throughout the conference and beyond. Interdisciplinary environmentalists will be able to examine whether standard conceptions of interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary process need to be modified to fit the distinctive challenges of environmental studies. Likewise, interdisciplinary best practices, techniques for finding common ground, strategies for constructing a more comprehensive understanding, and even the goal of interdisciplinary studies itself may need to be rethought, modified, or adapted as well for optimal use in environmental studies. The same may be true for many fields.

Sections should also enrich discussions in sessions aimed at all conference participants. More nuanced understandings of interdisciplinarity and its practices should emerge from challenges to generalizations coming out of prior discussions in section-sponsored sessions. And new members attracted to AIS by a section can then bring their enhanced appreciation for interdisciplinarity back to the conferences, journals, and courses in their field.

Starting a section

Any AIS member can start an interest group. First, email the AIS secretary, Shaunda Mankowski, at aisorg@oakland.edu and identify the field (e.g. environmental studies) of your proposed section. If that field is already on her list of sections, she will put you in touch with the contact person; if not, she will add it to the list with you as the contact person. Second, search the online AIS membership directory for others in the same field. (Go to Membership>Directory>Find A Member. You do not need a password: Click on Guest Account, then on the Login button. Search the database using Degrees/Interests and the Find button.) Email them an invitation to join the section and to help identify non-AIS members in your field who might be interested in joining as well. You are also encouraged to advertise the section on the AIS Facebook site and on the AIS-sponsored listserv, INTERDIS. Third, invite those non-AIS members to become charter members of the new section. (Note: There will be no additional cost to members for forming or joining a Section.) Fourth, propose one or more section-sponsored sessions at the next AIS conference when the Call for Proposals comes out. Fifth, caucus at the new sections breakfast at the conference. Sixth, each year after the conference email the AIS secretary a list of the members of your section (including contact information for those who are not AIS members).

Sections that attract enough

Continued on page 12
On Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity

By Simeon Dreyfuss
Chair of Interdisciplinary Studies
and Director of the Liberal Arts Core
Program at Marylhurst University.
Marylhurst is an adult-focused liberal
arts university.

Shortly after she joined our
Interdisciplinary Studies department,
a new colleague posted a black
and white line drawing on her
door. She held a joint appointment
with another department, a PhD
in Mythological Studies, and
loved Balkan music—she sang
in a Bulgarian women’s chorus,
that rhythmically asymmetrical
polyphony filled with odd harmonies
and nasal drones. The picture on
her door showed a cascade of
violins, kazoos, and bagpipes falling
into a meat grinder and a row of
hurdy gurdies coming out. For her,
she explained, the violin, kazoo,
and bagpipe were metaphorical
disciplines, and the hurdy gurdy was
interdisciplinary, a new and joyful
combination.

I had to wonder if the hurdy
gurdy wasn’t just a new discipline,
or perhaps an interdiscipline, and
whatever was interdisciplinary
happened hidden from view inside
that mysterious meat grinder. That
drawing led to many conversations
within our little department.

Such conversations about just
what a discipline is and how they
function within the academy are
central to Jerry A. Jacobs’ new
book, In Defense of Disciplines:
Interdisciplinarity and Specialization
in the Research University. He offers
a strongly data driven argument
that, contrary to the perception of
disciplines as narrow and limited
silos, disciplines are “dynamic
entities covering broad fields with
poorly defined boundaries” (p.
53) and offer the best institutional
instrumental definition of a discipline
as, “a broadly accepted field of
study that is institutionalized as
a degree granting department in
a large number of colleges and
universities” (p. 27). This definition
betrays Jacobs’ own discipline:
he is a professor of sociology at
the University of Pennsylvania, an
affiliate in a number of research
centers there, and has served as the
Editor of the American Sociological

A REVIEW

In Defense of Disciplines:
Interdisciplinarity and specialization in
the research university. J.A. Jacobs.
Chicago: University of Chicago
9780226069296). $90.

university structure within which
to advance knowledge, sustain
academic careers, and train new
students.

Central in his argument is his

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Review: Disciplines
Continued from page 3

Review. By this definition the violin might be a metaphorical discipline, broadly accepted as a solo and orchestral instrument and institutionalized as a subject of study at a large number of schools of music; the kazoo and hurdy gurdy not so much. His definition is, if anything, measurable, and he delineates the number of schools offering degree programs in various areas such as English, linguistics, biology, astronomy, anthropology, or psychology. He explicitly shies away from more common definitions of discipline within the literature on interdisciplinarity. Such definitions often focus on assertions that disciplines have specified phenomena they study, an epistemology defining valid knowledge within the discipline, and core concepts, theories, and methods.

Jacobs dismisses in a footnote Allen Repko’s delineation of the elements of disciplines in his text Interdisciplinary Research as “at odds with the realities of research.” He asserts that “Repko’s outline simply does not comport with the evolution of disciplinary boundaries” (pp. 234-235). Jacobs describes existing disciplines as infinitely more complex than the caricatures of them he finds in writing about interdisciplinarity. He offers a wide variety of statistical evidence showing that disciplines are enormously varied and dynamic enterprises. He argues that given the scale of the modern academic enterprise, with more than twenty eight thousand active peer reviewed journals, “no one individual could possibly keep up to date on this daunting and growing volume of research, [and] some division of labor among academics is doubtless needed” (p. 54). He shows that, perhaps counterintuitively, major disciplinary journals contain a wider variety of topics, and a larger number of cross disciplinary citations, than many interdisciplinary journals that are often narrowly topic-focused and specialized. He demonstrates that new ideas diffuse rapidly across disciplines, and that citations of influential articles follow the same curves both in and outside of their originating discipline, that science with original insights about cultural myth making—the field did not continue to generate dynamic interdisciplinary research largely because it was insufficiently large to produce and sustain a community of scholars. Rather, new ideas in the field tended to be generated from sources outside of American Studies itself. Jacobs comments, “Successful interdisciplinary endeavors are not simply a matter

In [Jacob's] view departments founded around disciplines are far more stable. They offer scholars authority, autonomy, control over faculty appointments, and a career path for the new scholars they train. By contrast, interdisciplinary programs tend to centralize decision making and power in administrators who control resources.

is, there are parallel up curves of acceptance and no evidence that scholars outside of disciplines hold onto ideas after they lose currency within disciplines.

Over and over Jacobs tests assertions that interdisciplinary scholars make about our work. Jacobs finds no greater prevalence of integrative thinking in self-consciously interdisciplinary research centers than in more traditional disciplinary ones. Nor does he find less examination of complex so called “wicked” problems in more traditional disciplinary journals than in interdisciplinary ones. He concludes that “change is often easier to accomplish within an existing discipline rather than via the creation of an entirely new field” (p. 155). He examines the case of American Studies over a period of nearly 70 years to test some common assertions about interdisciplinary work. He finds that while the original impulse of American Studies was deeply interdisciplinary—combining elements of history, literature, anthropology, sociology, political of individual scholars making ties between fields, or even organized efforts to promote communication across disciplinary boundaries. Enduring interdisciplinary ties … take years to develop and depend on the efforts of a large and committed group of researchers. They must be powerful enough to draw in a substantial number of scholars, to develop journals, to host conferences, and to create national associations. These intellectual currents do not arise every day, and do not fit the efforts of most individual scholars seeking to develop particular connections between fields.” (p. 186)

Despite this, he sees American Studies as a success story. “For all its limitations American studies has proven to be a far more dynamic and enduring interdisciplinary force than most small-scale efforts to promote interdisciplinarity” (p. 186).

The case of American Studies speaks to Jacob’s overriding concern with the kinds of order and institutional structures it takes to sustain the academic enterprise. In his view departments founded
around disciplines are far more stable. They offer scholars authority, autonomy, control over faculty appointments, and a career path for the new scholars they train. By contrast, interdisciplinary programs tend to centralize decision making and power in administrators who control resources. Interdisciplinary programs are easier to cut. They are sometimes whimsically refocused at times of financial exigency, melding programs with little in common, or chasing passing intellectual trends. He points out that in the almost decade it takes to complete a doctorate, a student can live through the average tenure of two deans and at least one university president. The academic enterprise, on the other hand, is generations long. He fears that reorganization of universities around interdisciplinary rather than disciplinary units will undermine ability to sustain transformative scholarship.

Many of us struggling to pursue interdisciplinary work within higher education are naturally sympathetic to many of Jacobs’ carefully argued and well supported points. In the case of the little department described in my opening paragraph, my colleague who posted that drawing was the first to be laid off when our university recently suffered a decline in enrollment. This, despite the fact that in our adult focused liberal arts university, the undergraduate interdisciplinary program has the largest number of majors on campus (the online business program is bigger) and one of the smallest number of faculty. For the last dozen years the other half of my job has been directing our Liberal Arts Core, that common part of all undergraduate degrees. I share Jacobs’ passion for finding and promoting institutional structures that will foster students’ critical engagement with a wide variety of ideas and perspectives. As the President of our campus chapter to the AAUP (American Association of University Professors), I even think he is right that traditional disciplinary departmental structures vest authority over the curriculum appropriately with the faculty (though I have at times disagreed vigorously with my peers about the exact structure of that curriculum).

And yet I want to return for a moment to that line drawing my former colleague posted on her door shortly after she was hired, a decade ago. I find Jacobs’ instrumental definition of an academic discipline most useful for helping me understand what interdisciplinary is not. In terms of that drawing, interdisciplinary happened inside that meat grinder. Interdisciplinarity is not a thing. It is different from a discipline as Jacobs defines it. Interdisciplinarity is not something institutional like that metaphorical violin or hurdy gurdy; it is not like sociology or American Studies. Interdisciplinarity is a sensibility. It is a way of approaching research, of understanding the relationships between ideas, of solving problems. As Jacobs conclusively demonstrates, interdisciplinary thinking happens all the time across the university, and quite frequently within established disciplines. I have written elsewhere that disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking are not different in kind, but rather are a manifestation of how deeply one is wed to particular historical institutionalizations of knowledge (Dreyfuss, 2011).

I meet students all the time who are restless with squeezing their interests into existing disciplines. Frankly, at an adult focused liberal arts university, I meet students who need to design a degree that takes better advantage of their existing credit than they could within more structured curricula. Those students desperately need intellectual tools to help them understand what they are really doing when they combine dissimilar academic traditions into an integrated study focused on a particular problem of interest to them. There may be, as Jacobs points out, more students interested in such applied fields as business. But that does not make understanding the nature of interdisciplinary thinking any less important. It is worth opening up that metaphorical meat grinder and demystifying what happens there. Whether or not many scholars publishing in journals of sociology, physics, history or literature cite authors outside their disciplines, it is still worth being curious about what we do when we are being interdisciplinary. It is worth describing that work clearly, how to do it systematically, and with a little more rigor.

But interdisciplinary scholars would do well to pay close attention to the various rhetorical overreaches Jacobs takes on in his book. Those of us exercising an interdisciplinary sensibility know our work is ineluctably founded in the disciplines. Our training and degrees are not in Interdisciplinary Studies, which after all has no inherent content. However, when we endeavor to describe what an interdisciplinary sensibility entails and how to enact interdisciplinary, if in response, disciplinarians feel the need to defend themselves, we have not been communicating clearly.

Equally, I think our colleagues in more traditional disciplines can fruitfully make use of the sensibilities we are working to describe. Whether or not one believes that true integration is possible (Jacobs has his doubts, and I am not sure) the study of interdisciplinarity elucidates crucial habits of thinking that will deepen any inquiry: entering

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into and embracing complexity instead of seeking to simplify, being curious about context and our own and other’s epistemological commitments, seeking collaboration and conversation, and knowing that we think better together than in isolation, even, or perhaps especially, when we disagree. These are habits of mind that need to be cultivated, like any other skill or method, and those of us interested in interdisciplinary scholarship must work hard to describe them clearly, to articulate useful patterns for conducting interdisciplinary research, and at the same time to understand the improvisatory and individual nature of interdisciplinary work.

Jacobs writes when discussing interdisciplinarity and the solutions to complex problems, “It is important to keep in mind that integrated solutions from one point of view are often clearly limited or incomplete from another point of view. Depending on how ‘the problem’ is defined a given strategy may represent a comprehensive solution, a partial solution, or a source of unintended consequences” (p. 128). True enough, though what he has struck on here as a critique of interdisciplinary work is in fact one of our core insights: All solutions, all theories, all insights, are partial and provisional, products of the context that produced them, and subject to being understood from another perspective. It is the work of interdisciplinary scholars to help us be forever curious about what is just beyond what we know.

References

EMERGING SCHOLARS COLUMN

**Metaphors for Integration: A Cross-Cultural Approach**

*By Asif Majid*

Interdisciplinary musical and theatrical artist and researcher, focusing on the performing arts as a peacebuilding and social transformation practice. He is interested in metaphor, narrative, and story as artistic ways of developing relationships and challenging pre-existing social and cultural paradigms. Currently, Asif is a Master’s student in Georgetown University’s Conflict Resolution program.

A cornerstone of interdisciplinary studies, integration is often articulated through metaphor. In an effort to add a cross-cultural dimension to discussions of integration, this essay presents four concepts that hail from traditions around the world. Paralleling integration in various ways, their original contexts include topics as diverse as poetry, language, emotion, and religion. Each offers unique insights into integration, furthering our understanding of this elusive yet foundational concept.

**XIBIPÍÍÓ**

Used by the Pirahã tribe of Amazonian Brazil, the concept of xibipíío (pronounced: i-bi-PEE-o) refers to “being on the boundaries of experience,” which anthropological linguist Daniel Everett labels “experiential liminality” (2008, p. 129). By itself, liminality refers to transitional rituals that occur in rites of passage (van Gannep, 1961; Turner, 1969). In the case of the Pirahã, a man leaving in a canoe exits the experiential perception of the observer, just as a voice coming onto the radio enters it: both are “xibipíío-ing,” as is a match when it flickers (Everett, 2008). This concept has major implications for the Pirahã: they have no sense of historicity or abstraction beyond what is in the immediate memory of living community members. As a result, Everett believes that the Pirahã might be the world’s “ultimate empiricists” (2009).

Xibipíío is a useful parallel because integration tends to move towards the edges of what is known. Achieving a cognitive advancement or finding common ground with another discipline comes on the edge of disciplinary experience. There, we test the fundamental assumptions of bodies of knowledge and determine how long they will flicker before going out. Knowing the limits of a discipline makes clear the boundaries beyond which integration may occur. Effective and successful integration creates new knowledge that is past a discipline’s frontier. Indeed, integration reflects intensive work that occurs at disciplinary boundaries.

Such advances reflect experiential liminality and highlight some aspects of INTEGRATION AS XIBIPÍÍÓ. Interdisciplinarians working towards integration push the boundaries of a given discipline to see what types of other applications may exist. Integration can happen at the edge of existence and periphery of perception, where ideas ebb and flow in and out of being. New ideas that address major problems—biomimicry in engineering and arts
therapy in psychiatry, for instance—come at the edge. INTEGRATION AS XIBIPÍÍO offers a conceptual metaphor for understanding where integration can likely be found: at the limit of disciplinary comfort.

BARZAKH

A second idea, barzakh (pronounced: BAR-zukh), has implications for contemporary understandings of integration. Found in the Qur’an, barzakh has two specific meanings: it is either a region that divides fresh and saltwater or the space between life and death. In the aquatic sense, barzakh refers to the “transition zone” between layers of fresh and saltwater that sees an overlapping flow; tides circulate saltwater from the sea to the transition zone and back out again, while freshwater moves from land to the transition zone and back again (Barlow, 2003). In the life and death sense, barzakh is a transitional state that embraces both the human and divine aspects of creation at once; it can also refer to “anything that separates two things, anything that is neither one thing nor another” (Ibn ‘Arabi, 1200/2006, p. 75).

In this understanding, INTEGRATION AS BARZAKH, disciplines can take from one another while retaining their individual qualities. Bodies of knowledge are fluid like fresh and saltwater such that they transition into various forms. Elements of a discipline that began at the core can make their way to the edge over time, intersecting with assumptions and ideas from other disciplines while overlapping with other bodies of knowledge in a transitional space. This initial contact between disciplines is key, as it can engender original and creative integrative insights through its interaction. Synthesizing ideas affects other disciplines or creates an entirely new space in between.

Simultaneously, the barzakh between life and death reminds us that true integrative work is the domain of no one discipline. Life and death do not control the state of barzakh, in which souls are both alive and dead. The INTEGRATION AS BARZAKH metaphor also encapsulates every integrative possibility that exists between multiple disciplines. Any concept that draws from multiple disciplines exists within the realm of interdisciplinary integration. At the same time, integration can establish a boundary between pre-existing disciplines. Sociologists interested in psychology and psychologists interested in sociology might be drawn to social psychology instead of their home discipline: the INTEGRATION AS BARZAKH metaphor draws a line between while overlapping the two disciplines. The multi-layered concept of barzakh highlights much of the complexity associated with integration.

DHVANI

Coming from Indian aesthetics, dhvani (pronounced: dhi-VUH-nee) is a way to understand the emotional nature of poetics beyond literal and metaphoric meanings. Dhvani is the echo of meaning or suggestion that deepens the value of a poem, constituting a meaning shift in a poem “from a superficial perceived meaning to a deeper, richer inferential meaning” (Dehejia, 1996, p. 90). This change of meaning is “vertical” rather than “horizontal” and results in a more focused understanding of a particular verse or word (personal communication, Harsha Dehejia, January 8, 2013). Such deep understanding comes from the echoes and following of poetic suggestion, delving into the heart of a poem while requiring that readers grapple with multiple truths at once.

In the INTEGRATION AS DHVANI metaphor, the depth of dhvani is most important. Significant disciplinary strength and understanding is required for true integration. INTEGRATION AS DHVANI calls for deep familiarity—beyond the surface-level biases, assumptions, and topic areas—with a particular discipline. This is necessary because disciplines have layers of knowledge that build on one other and echo pre-existing assumptions. Effective integration connects to the upper layers of a discipline and resonates through its foundations.

INTEGRATION AS DHVANI calls for deep familiarity—beyond the surface-level biases, assumptions, and topic areas—with a particular discipline. This is necessary because disciplines have layers of knowledge that build on one other and echo pre-existing assumptions. Effective integration connects to the upper layers of a discipline and resonates through its foundations.

Furthermore, an embrace of diverse, and perhaps contradictory, theories characterizes integration. This parallels dhvani such that readers of poetry must juggle multiple layers of meaning in order to comprehend the literal, metaphorical, and emotional aspects of a poem. Integration, in its broadest sense, calls for a transformation of myriad realities in a way that reconciles and connects them with one another.

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Emerging Scholars: Metaphors

INTEGRATION AS DHVANI reiterates the importance of valuing insights from different disciplines so that various perspectives can provide researchers with a more inclusive whole regarding issues or problems at hand. This capacity for multiplicity of meaning is a key feature of the INTEGRATION AS DHVANI metaphor.

YŪGEN

A final concept worth considering comes from Japanese aesthetics: yūgen (pronounced: yoo-GEN). Yūgen has multiple definitions and a lengthy history, including application in Japanese poetry, tea ceremonies, and Nō theatre. The concept is some combination of “the beauty of gentle gracefulness,” “a common feeling or a common world found at the depth of sensibility,” and “the sense of the mysterious quiescence beneath all things,” framed through cloudy impenetrability, obscurity, and unknowability (Tsubaki, 1971, p. 56). This ambiguity is “an area where artists feel at ease [having sensed aesthetic significance] but scholars and interpreters often find themselves lost” (Kōjirō, 1965, p. 7). In yūgen, murkiness is the source of understanding, achieved through experience rather than description.

Integration is inspired by ambiguity. It involves originating from a place of uncertainty and moving towards clarity; INTEGRATION AS YŪGEN requires an embrace of the obscurity that leads to integration. Vagueness is a key characteristic of “finalized” integration as well, as it is often difficult to pinpoint what disciplinary threads led to what parts of an integrated tapestry. Similarly, integration is often perceived of as untidy when juxtaposed against many discipline-specific understandings of neat knowledge. This parallels yūgen’s originating haziness because it places integrated insights both inside and outside a pre-established discipline. The crux of integration’s ambiguity is not that it is in multiple places, but that it is in those places at once.

Furthermore, the INTEGRATION AS YŪGEN metaphor points to an effective collaboration between the subtle and the profound: the micro and the macro. This collaboration highlights both yūgen and integration as escaping definition; oftentimes, both are better explained through experience and metaphor. Simultaneous expressions of subtlety and profundity are characteristic of effective integration, but it is difficult to label such mixing. Instead, it is fluid and amorphous, sometimes to the point of defying explanation. There is a certain intangible quality about integration that relies on interdisciplinarians knowing it when they see it, just as those experiencing yūgen turn inward to their elusive feelings in order to capture yūgen.

INTEGRATION AS YŪGEN offers key insights into the more intuitive aspects of integration.

Final Thoughts

Xibipíío, barzakh, dhvani, and yūgen offer distinct metaphors for understanding integration from a global perspective. In attaching the idea of integration to these concepts, we can see different characteristics of integration. Xibipíío and barzakh both emphasize the spaces in which integration is most likely to be achieved. They highlight the boundary-based nature of interdisciplinary endeavors. Dhvani and yūgen demonstrate what integration looks like. They explore the importance of depth of knowledge and ambiguity in the process of creating integrated insights. All four concepts are unique in their ability to facilitate understandings of integration.

Using these ideas offers conceptual inclusivity. Integration often includes more than two disciplines, drawing on multiple insights to create something new. From the viewpoint of these concepts, integration is holistic in its meaning and dynamic in its application. It is able to embrace various, sometimes contradictory, perspectives in a continuous endorsement of multiple truths.

Further, these global concepts increase clarity regarding the exact nature of integration, promoting fine details and distinctions. This framing of integration reflects a fluidity of insights that impact disciplinary strands and the relationships between them. Rather than relying on static and linear progressions of knowledge, these concepts represent a reverberation of insights and approaches that highlight unique, strong, and powerful integrations.

Integration is the key to success in interdisciplinary work. Cross-cultural metaphors offer rich resources that can broaden and deepen our understanding of integration. The key spaces in which integration occurs and the dynamics of integration should be viewed through global lenses, developing gradations and nuances in our approaches to interdisciplinarity. In so doing, we strengthen the theoretical frameworks of our field and further best practices when undertaking interdisciplinary endeavors.

References


The Changing Demographics of AIS: Membership Report

While it is difficult for many reasons to compile a demographic profile of all interdisciplinarians in the United States, much less of those world-wide, it is possible by studying the membership of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies to make some credible estimates of the demographic characteristics of self-conscious interdisciplinarians, i.e., interdisciplinarians who are intentional and explicit about their interdisciplinary. And by comparing the characteristics of AIS members at different points in time, it is possible to illuminate how the profile of self-conscious interdisciplinarians has changed over time. Below are the results of a comparison of AIS members in 1993 and 2013.

Sex: The 35 participants in the National Conference on the Teaching of Interdisciplinary Social Science who founded the Association for Integrative Studies in April of 1979 were almost exclusively male. In the following 15 years, however, AIS membership had ample opportunity to become more representative of the sex ratio of self-conscious interdisciplinarians. Yet even by 1993 fully two-thirds (67.9%) of the 656 AIS members (excluding libraries) were males, even though four of the twelve AIS presidents up to 1993 were female. By 2013, though, as membership nearly doubled, the sex ratio had become almost exactly 1.00. Of the 1232 AIS members (again excluding libraries), 50.2% were males. As far as I know, there has been no discussion (much less a satisfactory explanation) of why males were so disproportionately represented in the IDS profession early on, or why so many more females entered the profession in the last twenty years.

Geographical Distribution: The participants in the founding conference in 1979 were drawn exclusively from IDS programs in the United States. By 1993 the percentage of non-U.S. members in AIS was still a mere 1.8%. Of those, half were from Canada while one member each came from Belgium, Sweden, and Switzerland in Europe, New Zealand in Oceania, Qatar in the Mideast, and Taiwan in Asia. By 2013, however, the percentage of AIS membership from outside the United States had grown to 5.4%. While that percentage is still quite small, it represents an impressive three-fold increase in the proportion of non-U.S. members.

Again, Canada accounted for exactly 50%, but now AIS members came from fifteen other countries. Of those, Australia accounted for 10.4% of non-U.S. members, the Netherlands for 9.0%, and the UK for 7.5%, with one or two members each from Denmark, Germany, Romania, Sweden, and Switzerland in Europe, Israel, Qatar, and UAE in the Mideast, Argentina and Brazil in South America, and Korea and Nepal in Asia.

Again, we need to discover why so few AIS members came from outside the United States early on, and why their numbers have increased so rapidly in the last twenty years. Has there been a geographical dispersion of self-conscious interdisciplinarity from the United States to Canada, then Europe, and finally the rest of the planet?

The geographical distribution of AIS members within the United States can be analyzed using Census Bureau Designated Areas, which in turn are broken down into sub-regions. In 1993, the Northeast accounted for 21.6% of U.S. AIS membership, with New England states (ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI) contributing 8.9% and Mid Atlantic states (NY, NJ, PA, PR) 12.7%. The Midwest provided 29.8%, with 19.4% coming from East North Central states (WI, MI, IL, IN, OH) and 10.4% from West North Central states (MO, ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA). The South yielded 25.9%, with 14.9% from South Atlantic states (DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, FL), 6.2% from East South Central states (KY, TN, MS, AL), and 4.8% from West South Central States (OK, TX, AR, LA). The West produced 22.7%, with 6.4% from Mountain states (ID, MT, WY, NV, UT, CO, AZ, NM) and 16.3% from Pacific states (AK, WA, OR, CA, HI). Individual states

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Membership Report

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providing the most AIS members were CA (13.2%), OH (7.6%), NY (6.7%), MI (5.35%), MN (4.5%), KY (4.3%), PA (4.2%), MA (3.7%), IL (3.3%), and NC (3.3%). Among the 50 states only SD and HI had no AIS members.

While the Midwest and, to a lesser extent, the South had the most AIS members, what comes across most clearly is their widespread geographical dispersion. If anything, the distribution of AIS members within the United States more closely mirrors the distribution of total population than the distribution of colleges and universities. This observation supports the finding first reported in the introduction to Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Programs: A Directory (1986; p. vi) that self-conscious interdisciplinarity is a grass roots rather than an elite phenomenon.

In 2013, 20.0% of AIS membership in the U.S. came from the Northeast (7.1% New England and 12.9% Mid Atlantic), 27.6% from the Midwest (19.8% East North Central and 7.8% West North Central), 37.2% from the South (24.4% South Atlantic, 7.0% East South Central, and 5.8 West South Central), and 15.2% from the West (5.7% Mountain and 9.5% Pacific). The states with the most AIS members were IL (7.0%), CA (6.0%), MI (5.5%), NC (5.2%), VA (5.0%), TX (4.3%), NY (5.6%), and PA (4.6%). What comes through most clearly from a comparison of the data for 1993 and 2013 is that AIS membership (and presumably the self-conscious interdisciplinarity it reflects) is now spread all the more evenly among states and even more egalitarian (with the Northeast providing an even smaller proportion of members and the South even more).

Primary Area of Interest: Finally, it is possible to identify the primary interests and areas of expertise of AIS members. These were categorized into humanities, fine & performing arts, social science, natural science (including mathematics), education, and other professions (e.g., architecture, business, engineering, law, medicine).

The founders of AIS were all social scientists: interdisciplinary social science was the focus of the conference and only social scientists were invited. By 1993, though, the areas of primary interest/expertise of AIS members had become humanities (46.2%), social science (21.3%), education (11.4%), natural science (8.9%), other professions (6.7%), and fine & performing arts (5.5%). If there was any suspicion that the preponderance of males or the paucity of members from outside the United States in 1993 were merely a carryover from the founding of AIS, the social sciences should also be the dominant area in 1993, yet humanists were more than twice as prevalent as social scientists among AIS members then. The preponderance of humanists among self-conscious interdisciplinarians of twenty years ago cries out for explanation. It cannot be attributed to the insistence of AIS on self-consciousness, integration and real-world applicability in interdisciplinary studies (all of which many humanists resist). So why were humanists so much better represented than social and natural scientists?

The comparable figures on areas of interest/expertise of AIS members in 2013 are humanities (39.1%), social science (22.5%), natural science (10.2%), education (9.8%), fine & performing arts (9.3%), and other professions (8.5%). Today, the humanities are a little less predominant, and natural science, education, fine & performing arts, and the other professions are somewhat more equally represented. Self-conscious interdisciplinarity continues to be dominated by humanists and, to a less extent by social scientists, but it seems to be spreading throughout the academy.

Now that a demographic profile of self-conscious, intentional and explicit interdisciplinarians is available and we have some idea of how that profile has changed over time, I encourage other scholars to research why the profile takes the shape it does and why it has evolved the way it has. It behooves us to learn more about ourselves.

— William H. Newell, AIS Executive Director

Call for Paper & Session Proposals

36th Annual Meeting of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies Michigan State University October 16-19, 2014
Interdisciplinary Public Problems, the Global Community, and Diversity

Michigan State University is proud to host the 2014 annual meeting of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies. Presentations and workshops will be held at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center located on the campus of Michigan State University. Given MSU’s proud history as the nation’s pioneer Land Grant University and its commitment to research and education that engages scholars from the humanities, natural sciences, arts, social sciences
and professions, the 2014 AIS conference will invite participants to explore the ways in which interdisciplinary studies engage today’s problems and opportunities.

The theme of the 2014 AIS conference emerged from a growing consensus that public problems—problems affecting multiple groups and populations across cultures in a diverse, global community—require insights and tools from a variety of disciplines, perspectives, and practices. As scholars and teachers, we are members of both local and global communities with a mandate to explore the roots and potential solutions to public problems and to educate a generation that is capable of addressing them. To do this, we must interrogate, integrate, and expand existing knowledge by creating collaborative relationships among disciplines in the arts, humanities, and sciences and by adopting integrative modes of research, education, and learning, communication, and policy-making.

We invite proposals for individual papers, sessions, panels, workshops and roundtable discussions. Scheduled sessions times will be 90 minutes long, and the program committee would welcome sets of sessions on related topics.

The program committee is particularly interested in presentations that employ research from two or more humanities, natural science, arts, or social science disciplines. Specialized presentations dealing with the perspectives offered by individual disciplines are encouraged if they are designed to stimulate discussions on the wider conference theme of interdisciplinary public problems. General presentations that advance the mission of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies are also encouraged. We welcome presentations on any relevant topic, including:

- Social, political, or environmental issues that represent a “wicked problem” for scholars, scientists, policy-makers
- Models of interdisciplinary partnerships: public-private collaborations, government funded interdisciplinary programs, cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary initiatives
- The impact of diversity in undergraduate students’ learning environments: residential colleges (living-learning environment), commuter campuses, and virtual campuses
- The role of experiential learning in undergraduate education, including study abroad, internship, service-learning, inquiry-based laboratories, team-teaching across disciplines, artistic or performance-based learning experiences, use of original sources, study of complex problems from multiple angles, student scholarship and research as an interdisciplinary endeavor
- Pathways into interdisciplinary problem solving on the undergraduate level
- The ethics and politics of global or local interdisciplinary research
- Role of the media (including social media) in shaping interdisciplinary public problems in the global community
- Models and strategies to integrate the arts and/or humanities and the social and/or natural sciences

Paper proposals should include the presenter’s name, title, organizational affiliation, email address, the paper’s title, and a 150-250 word paper abstract. Individual papers should be designed to fit into a 30 minute time period for presentation and questions.

Proposals for sessions, panels, workshops, performances, or roundtable discussions should

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members will be allotted space on the AIS website and in the newsletter, and be recognized in the conference program. All sections will be able to propose sessions for the annual conference and hold their own roundtable at the Section Breakfast.

include the organizer’s and presenters’ names, titles, organizational affiliations, email addresses, session and paper titles, and a 250-400 word session abstract. They should be designed to fit into one or more 90 minute time periods.

Proposals should be emailed to ais2014@msu.edu with “Proposal” in the subject line. Proposals submitted by May 15, 2014 will be given priority, and we will respond to submissions by June 1, 2014. The program committee will continue to accept proposals until the final deadline of July 31, 2014. Please direct any questions to ais2014@msu.edu

About AIS

The Association for Interdisciplinary Studies is the U.S.-based international professional association devoted to interdisciplinary teaching (including service learning), research, program administration, and public policy. Interdisciplinarity integrates the insights of knowledge domains to produce a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems, issues, or questions. AIS serves as an organized professional voice and source of information on interdisciplinary approaches and the integration of insights from diverse communities to address complex problems in education and research. Founded in 1979, it is incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3 educational association in the state of Ohio.