



# ASSOCIATION FOR INTEGRATIVE STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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## ***Six arguments for agreeing on a definition of interdisciplinary studies***

By William H. Newell, Executive Director of the Association for Integrative Studies, and Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

Who cares about a definition? It's just words, semantics, empty rhetoric, right? What we *do* care about is academic freedom, including constraints imposed by so-called leaders in our field or colleagues in our department who want to impose their ideas on what we feel like doing in our own classroom. Interdisciplinary studies should be freeing—what Giles Gunn called an “academic poaching license”—so any barriers to where and how we roam across academic fields are artificial and must be resisted.

What follows are six arguments for why you *should* care about the definition of interdisciplinary studies. I start by explaining why you and your colleagues need to *agree* on a single working definition that informs everything from advertising for students to advising to every one of the interdisciplinary courses offered, whether you teach in an interdisciplinary program, either at the undergraduate or the graduate level, or you teach in the interdisciplinary portion of a general education program. Next, I identify six prominent definitions and point out the extent of their consensus. Then I parse those definitions to bring out the remaining issues in the definition of interdisciplinary studies.

*A. Why you and your colleagues need to take the definition of interdisciplinary studies seriously and agree on your own working definition*

### **1. Academic Politics**

Prominent, long-standing interdisciplinary programs are being closed across the United States. In part, senior administrators perceive that, since faculty across the institution are now engaged in interdisciplinary studies, programs dedicated to IDS are no longer necessary. They've already fulfilled their mission. To make the case that they are in fact contributing something different, IDS

programs need to point out that they are engaged in all, not just a part, of the interdisciplinary process. Full interdisciplinarity represents our best hope for solving complex problems that cut across disciplinary boundaries, and students engaged in it develop many highly desirable educational skills not achieved through partial interdisciplinarity, such as evaluating expert testimony, seeing (and valuing) all sides of an issue, contextualizing, synthesizing or integrating, and engaging in critical thinking in which the critical gaze is also turned inward. Typically, that means IDS programs integrate rather than merely juxtapose what they draw from disciplines, and/or they are intentional about process. Ideally, they also engage in research on interdisciplinarity itself. They cannot credibly make this argument, however, without a definition of interdisciplinary studies that explicitly necessitates integration or process. In short, the implicit presumption that “interdisciplinary studies is whatever we feel like doing” is coming back to haunt faculty in interdisciplinary programs. Lots of other faculty now feel that they're doing interdisciplinary studies, and there's no way to distinguish full from partial, or good from bad, interdisciplinary studies when we can't even agree on what IDS *is*.

When disciplinary critics charge that interdisciplinary general education is of dubious intellectual merit, mere curricular self-indulgence of undisciplined faculty—what a generation ago was called “mental masturbation,” it is a weak retort (even if it's accurate) to point out that they are hopelessly behind the times. If faculty members teaching those general education courses are doing whatever they want in the name of interdisciplinary studies, then the critics have a point. If, on the other hand, the interdisciplinary faculty have a common conception

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of what interdisciplinary studies is, they can show the ways in which they are rigorously following through on the implications of that definition.

#### 2. Learning Outcomes

Different definitions of interdisciplinary studies reflect different conceptions of IDS, which result in different curricular and pedagogical decisions, which result in different intellectual activities that have different learning outcomes. Interdisciplinary studies geared towards complex problem solving hold out the promise of producing many important additional learning outcomes compared to interdisciplinary studies that focus merely on contrasting different disciplinary approaches, finding connections between ideas, or engaging a topic without explicit attention to disciplines. A conception of interdisciplinarity that is instrumental rather than merely comparative, exploratory, or contemplative should go much farther towards preparing students for citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for working in teams on complex problems, and for personal empowerment in a complex world.

Where there is agreement among faculty about the definition of interdisciplinary studies, and thus the nature of interdisciplinarity, it is possible to develop assessment instruments that measure the anticipated educational outcomes from their courses. Where there is no common definition of interdisciplinary studies, thus no agreement on what interdisciplinary study is, it is not possible to assess learning outcomes because there is no basis for agreement on what distinctively interdisciplinary outcomes to look for. As a result, it is effectively impossible for the faculty to provide evidence of value added through interdisciplinary education. (For an example of such an instrument, based on the Klein & Newell 1996 “emerging consensus” definition of interdisciplinary studies, see the AIS-Sponsored Writing Assessment Profiles at [www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/pubs/pubs.html](http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/pubs/pubs.html))

#### 3. Student Morale

Students in an interdisciplinary program

comprised of courses grounded in different, often unspecified, definitions of interdisciplinary studies have much more difficulty explaining what their program (and perhaps their major or degree) is about than students in programs that are explicit and consistent in explaining what IDS is. Such inarticulateness is mildly embarrassing when talking to Aunt Mildred at Christmas, but it has more serious consequences when interviewing with a prospective employer.

Students already have enough trouble understanding why they need to take general education courses of any sort instead of useful courses in their major, which leads to the attitude that general education courses are something they need to “get out of the way.” Because they don’t see the point of general education courses, they tend to put less effort into them. Ill-defined interdisciplinary general education courses exacerbate these tendencies, because students don’t even understand what the courses are about, much less why they should take them. On the other hand, interdisciplinary general education courses can be highly motivating when they are based on a clear definition of interdisciplinary studies which mandates that the course focus on issues (especially ones they see as “relevant” to their lives or to the society in which they live, e.g., the right to privacy in an age of terrorism), and follow an identifiable process (e.g., examine the issue from the perspective of relevant disciplines, draw insights from them, create common ground, and construct a more comprehensive understanding) that leads to more efficacious behavior (e.g., come up with a solution that’s responsive to all relevant perspectives).

Students taking interdisciplinary courses, whether in general education or a major, are even more motivated if they see IDS as a way to integrate their undergraduate education and connect disciplinary courses to the real world. And even the most cynical students find IDS courses motivating if they set out a generalized process through which students can learn to cope with any complex problem.

#### 4. Academic Community

If faculty members teaching different sections of the same interdisciplinary course, or even different interdisciplinary courses, share a common working definition of interdisciplinary studies and thus a common conception of interdisciplinarity, they can much more easily talk with each other about common curricular and pedagogical challenges they face. They can provide more meaningful feedback on each other’s syllabi, lectures, seminar discussion topics, assignments, and exams. A shared conception of interdisciplinarity also increases the likelihood that faculty members with complementary interests, perhaps discovered through comparative discussions of their separate interdisciplinary courses or through teaching different sections of the same course, will develop joint research proposals.

If students taking different interdisciplinary courses or different sections of the same course, whether in a major or in general education, share a common explicit definition of interdisciplinary studies, they will have at least some common ground on which to discuss those courses outside the classroom. If the definition leads to explicit attention to the same general interdisciplinary process, they can use examples from their different courses to clarify the nature of that process. A shared process for addressing any complex problem would also give them a common strategy for working together to solve problems in the residence hall or learning community, on campus, and in the community.

#### 5. Depth and Sophistication

Later courses in a sequence of interdisciplinary courses (whether upper division interdisciplinary general education courses or more advanced courses in an interdisciplinary major) cannot provide more depth or sophistication about interdisciplinarity if they have to start over again in presenting the nature of interdisciplinary studies. If, however, a later course in the sequence can presume that students who took different sections of the earlier course or different courses

altogether were presented with the same definition of interdisciplinary studies, the later course can go into more depth about the nature of interdisciplinarity or address conceptual, theoretical, or methodological issues of interdisciplinarity with more sophistication. The more explicit the earlier discussions of interdisciplinarity, the more likely students are in later courses to have a clear understanding of it. If the common definition sets up a common understanding of interdisciplinary process, that process can then be discussed in more depth or with more sophistication in the later course. Thus, for example, 300-level interdisciplinary courses can be more advanced than 200-level courses in terms of their interdisciplinarity as well as their disciplinarity.

## 6. Saving Face

With a few exceptions (e.g., American studies), most faculty teaching in graduate interdisciplinary programs were themselves trained in a discipline and picked up an interdisciplinary approach later on the job. Moreover, they typically developed their own idiosyncratic style of interdisciplinary research because the professional literature on interdisciplinarity, until fairly recently, had little to offer them. Most have not seen any point in reexamining that professional literature in recent years, and thus have missed its dramatic increase in sophistication and depth of analysis, and thus its utility. (In part that burgeoning of the professional literature was made possible by a growing consensus on the nature of interdisciplinarity itself, i.e., on its definition.) Their graduate students, however, are much more likely to seek out that professional literature, having no such bias against it and needing guidance in conducting interdisciplinary research. Consequently, graduate faculty are increasingly likely to be directing the research of students who are much more familiar with the professional literature on interdisciplinarity than they are. The resulting dynamic between graduate student and adviser will not be pretty.

## B. Definitions of Interdisciplinary Studies

Even if you accept that attention to and consensus on a working definition of interdisciplinary studies is desirable, you may be reluctant to expend the effort if the task seems hopelessly difficult. If the IDS profession can't come to agreement on the nature of interdisciplinarity, and thus on a definition of IDS, what chance do we stand? And why would anyone else give much credence to it, anyway? Luckily, in the last decade considerable progress has been made towards achieving definitional consensus. Consider the following definitions from a range of prominent sources (arranged in reverse chronological order).

### 1. From Sage Publications

Allen Repko (May 2008) in *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Sage Publications) defines interdisciplinary studies as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline and draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights to produce a more comprehensive understanding or cognitive advancement.”

### 2. From a leader in the interdisciplinary studies profession

William Newell (2007) in “Decision Making in Interdisciplinary Studies” in Göktug Morçöl (ed.), *Handbook of Decision Making* (New York: Marcel-Dekker, 2007) 245-264, defines interdisciplinary studies as “a two-part process: it draws critically on disciplinary perspectives, and it integrates their insights into a more comprehensive understanding ... of an existing complex phenomenon [or into] the creation of a new complex phenomenon” (248).

### 3. From Teagle Foundation (with a grant from Social Science Research Council)

Diana Rhoten et al. (2006) in *Interdisciplinary Education at Liberal Arts Institutions*, a Teagle Foundation White Paper available at [www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/pdf/2006\\_ssric\\_whitepaper](http://www.teaglefoundation.org/learning/pdf/2006_ssric_whitepaper).

pdf, define interdisciplinary education as “a mode of curriculum design and instruction in which individual faculty or teams identify, evaluate, and integrate information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of knowledge to advance students' capacity to understand issues, address problems, and create new approaches and solutions that extend beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of instruction” (3).

### 4. From Harvard University's Project Zero

Veronica Boix Mansilla's (2005) in “Assessing Student Work at Disciplinary Crossroads, *Change Magazine* January/February 37:2, 20-27, defines interdisciplinary understanding as “the capacity to integrate knowledge and modes of thinking drawn from two or more disciplines to produce a cognitive advancement—e.g., explaining a phenomenon, solving a problem, creating a product, or raising a new question—in ways that would have been unlikely through single disciplinary ... means ... the integration of disciplinary perspectives is a means to a purpose, not an end in itself” (15).

### 5. From the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine

The Committee on Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research and Committee on Science, Engineering, and Policy of the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine (2005) in *Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press) define interdisciplinary research as “a mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a discipline or field of research practice. ... Research is truly interdisciplinary when it is not just pasting two disciplines together to create one

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product but rather is an integration and synthesis of ideas and methods” (26-27).

#### 6. From the Association of American Colleges & Universities

The emerging consensus definition identified by Klein and Newell (1997), “Advancing Interdisciplinary Studies” in Jerry Gaff & James Ratcliff/AAC&U, *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) defines interdisciplinary studies as “a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession. ... IDS draws on disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insights through construction of a more comprehensive perspective” (393-394).

While there is still some variation in these definitions, they are noteworthy for the extent of national consensus they reflect, the diversity and prominence of their sources, and the range of interdisciplinary activities they cover. In short, there is now sufficient definitional agreement nationally on interdisciplinary studies to make it feasible for interdisciplinarians in the same program to thrash out their own working definition.

The nature of that definitional consensus and the unresolved issues that remain are discussed below.

#### C. Parsing the Definitions

These six definitions have the following elements in common:

1. An interdisciplinary study has a specific substantive focus.
2. The focus of an interdisciplinary study exceeds the scope of a single perspective.
3. The distinctive characteristic of the focus of an interdisciplinary study is that it is broad or complex.
4. Interdisciplinary studies as a whole is characterized by an identifiable process/mode.
5. Interdisciplinary studies draw explicitly on the disciplines.

6. Disciplines provide insights into the specific substantive focus of an interdisciplinary study.
7. Interdisciplinary study requires integration.
8. The objective of integration is instrumental.
9. The goal of interdisciplinary study is pragmatic: to solve a problem, resolve an issue, address a topic, answer a question, explain a phenomenon, or create a new product.

A working definition that embraces these elements will have surface credibility. If the definition is challenged, the program can point to the prominent national definitions above that share those elements.

#### D. Remaining Definitional Issues

1. Is the appropriate focus of interdisciplinary studies an issue, problem, question, topic, phenomenon, new product, or all of the above? Put differently, does IDS manifest itself differently, depending on its focus?
2. Is the appropriate perspective on which IDS draws a discipline, profession, area of instruction, field of research practice, approach from outside the academy altogether, or any/all of the above?
3. Just how broad or complex need the specific substantive focus be in order to require an interdisciplinary approach? Must the focus be broad as well as complex, or is narrow complexity sufficient to necessitate interdisciplinary study?
4. How does mode (to which the Teagle Foundation White Paper and the National Academies refer) differ from process? How/how much can process or mode be identified?
5. What, exactly, do interdisciplinary studies draw from the disciplines? Candidates include information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, theories, methods, or any/all of the above. And how, exactly, do interdisciplinary studies go about drawing from disciplines?
6. What is the relationship between the

insights provided by disciplines and the information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, theories, or methods drawn from disciplines?

7. Is it disciplinary insights (three definitions), disciplinary perspectives (one definition), disciplinary ideas and methods (one definition), or information, data, techniques, tools, concepts, and theories (one definition) that get integrated? How does that integration take place? Are there any prerequisites to integration?
8. Is the objective of interdisciplinary integration a more comprehensive understanding/perspective (three definitions), or an advancement in cognition/capacity (three definitions)? Does the latter imply the former?
9. Do interdisciplinary studies need to achieve that objective to be fully interdisciplinary, or does mere progress towards that objective suffice? How do we know when that objective has been achieved?

It is through discussion of these issues that an interdisciplinary program can arrive at agreements that put a distinctive stamp on the program’s working definition of interdisciplinary studies. It is how a faculty can make the definition its own. However, there is a rich professional literature on interdisciplinarity to which they can turn for inspiration and guidance. AIS has, of course, played a significant role in developing that literature and in shaping the discussions from which it emerged. See the AIS Publications section of our Web site at <http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/>.

Such discussions should also go a long ways towards sharpening the faculty’s thinking about interdisciplinarity in general. If the discussions result in some agreement on interdisciplinary process, it should then be possible as well to design courses at different levels in the curriculum or in different slots in a sequence so that higher or later courses provide more depth or sophistication in interdisciplinarity. ■■■■

# AIS Conference retrospective:

## *A collective report from the 2007 ASU host team*

By Denise Bates, Nalini Chhetri, David Conz, Stephanie deLusé, Kevin Ellsworth, Layne Gneiting, Jessica Hirshorn, Farzad Mahootian, Brian McCormack, Kelly Nelson, Michael Pryzdia, Dave Thomas, and Dave Wells, Arizona State University.

Ten years ago the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies program at Arizona State University graduated its first two dozen students. In the following decade, we have focused our resources on building a strong curriculum, an outstanding faculty and staff, a secure academic home, and a community of more than 5,000 alums. Today the program is stronger than ever. Thus it was with great pride that we were in a position to turn our energies to the service of the Association for Integrative Studies by hosting its annual conference. Twenty-one faculty, academic advisers, and staff worked together to plan and host a conference that attendees reported was a great success. As one final expression of our teamwork, we offer this collective report.



Working with colleagues toward this common goal was extremely rewarding. Hosting the conference provided a unique opportunity to build relationships through effective teamwork. Our different perspectives, ideas, skills, and interests blended in a way that certainly created a whole that was greater than the sum of the individual parts. I was excited to be part of a team that works so well together!

168 registered participants  
90 first time attendees  
15 students  
12 colleagues from foreign countries  
1 Mariachi band

The AIS board members, as always, distinguished themselves by being as approachable as they are interesting. While they may be tucked away for hours in meetings before the conference, once the participants arrive, they are great emissaries and are gracious to

newcomers and returning members alike.



The sessions I attended were certainly both mentally and emotionally stimulating: my mind raced with all kinds of ideas that I want to present at a future AIS conference. It was nice to be educated on the history of interdisciplinary studies and the history of the association itself. I learned a lot in conversation with people but also as a result of browsing through old journal volumes and books displayed at the book table.

At what other conference do you have sessions on yoga, iPods, global warming, Holocaust memoirs, health care, Kenya, curriculum, stem cell research, King Lear, chemistry, literature, disciplinary boundaries, digital intellectual property, forecasting, violence, service learning, the arts, pedagogy, immigration, philosophy, citizenship, capstones and first-year learning communities, spirituality, ethnography, film, death, design, sublime experiences, journal editing, drama, cities, Japanese poetry, economics, the Cold War, faculty development, and art museums, all under one roof?

I was very happy to hear that there is more of a divergence than a convergence on what is considered most important in interdisciplinary studies. During presentations by some acknowledged leaders and elders in the field, I noted the opposite tendency: explicit efforts to “discipline” interdisciplinarity by standardizing the criteria by which the interdisciplinarity of a product is judged. In my opinion this is a very important trend, but not the ultimate, and not necessarily the most desirable, destination of interdisciplinary studies. I believe a robust variety of concepts of interdisciplinarity is a sign of vitality.

This was my first AIS conference, and I found myself wondering why there are so few natural science people in AIS since that seems to be where much of the discourse on interdisciplinarity is centered nowadays.

The AIS logo belies integration. The message in the literature on interdisciplinarity is clear in its valuation of interdisciplinarity over multidisciplinary approaches. Yet the visual message of the jigsaw logo on the AIS membership brochure is clearly one of *multi* not *inter*. Integration requires interpenetration and transformation of the disciplines that are connected. This is clearly not the case with pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: they remain stubbornly themselves no matter what they are connected with. The inappropriateness of fit goes even further: jigsaw puzzle pieces admit only *a single correct solution*. I suggest that it may be time for a new AIS logo.

It’s always a challenging task to read through the conference program and decide which of the competing sessions might be most beneficial. It’s a thrill to happen on a session that really has an impact on how you think about a topic. Carl Rogers differentiates significant learning from casual learning by stating that significant learning is something that makes a difference in an individual’s behavior, attitude, personality, or the course of action taken in the future. I’m happy to say that I experienced significant learning in one particular session and that my curriculum and approach to teaching have improved as a result.



Many people participated in the various excursions we offered. Thirty-six guests  
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**AIS Conference retrospective...***(continued from page 5)*

the magical moonlight how Frank Lloyd Wright integrated nature and architecture in the compound where he lived, worked, and taught his many apprentices. Others visited the campus of Arizona State University to experience several interdisciplinary projects: the Decision Theater, the Digital Arts Ranch, and Innovation Space. Many others toured the Heard Museum of Native Cultures and Art, enjoyed the Tony Award-winning *Jersey Boys* in Frank Lloyd Wright's Gammage Auditorium, and dined at the Desert Botanical Garden.

White vans of scholars  
Botanical garden bound  
Perspectives converge

The desert sun sets  
Cacti surround. We're hungry!  
A feast soon appears

I was fortunate enough to host a dinner circle. I truly enjoyed interacting with my colleagues in this informal setting and seeing Bill Newell and James Welch belly dance! Photographs are available for the low price of \$9.95 plus postage and handling.



Theater's mantra is "take risks." But we like to play it safe, don't we? You know, stick with what works. Venture ... but on a short leash. So when our committee mulled over Odds Bodkin as a keynote "speaker," the red flags jumped up. "Is he an academic?" some asked. "What makes him interdisciplinary? How does a storyteller fit our conference theme?" Odds seemed, well, a rather odd choice. Nevertheless, he remained our frontrunner, and in he came, albeit with some trepidation on our part. But all fears vanished when the Master Talesman took the stage with his 12-string Gibson guitar. Blending compelling music, an array of voices, riveting imagery, and an eloquence all his own, Odds showed us all that it's okay to take risks ... even on a storyteller.

Odds Bodkin's performance of

*Yudisthira at Heaven's Gate: A Tale from the Mahabharata* sparked thoughts of how we might use narrative more in the classroom and proffered an invitation to consider accessing our inner storyteller and finding the analogues to words, music, and character in our own topics.

As I listened to Odds' performance, I was thrown back to 1989 as an exchange student in India sitting on my host family's pink-and-white tiled floor watching a small TV set filled with Indian actors dressed in colorful costumes re-enacting a story from the *Mahabharata*. I could hear the actors' intonations and visualize their movements across the screen as Odds narrated the story. That enjoyable evening allowed me to reconnect with India, to integrate my various life experiences.

Dr. Amira de la Garza's keynote address struck a chord with me. Her personal experience of being hit by a car while she was stressed out, worrying about university politics, reminded me to focus on the things in life that matter most: my family and my students.

Dr. Garza offered a lyrically written personal tale of integration in a somewhat non-linear presentation including an opening ritual. While this may have been outside the comfort zone for some participants, it could be argued that stretching is what interdisciplinarians do best.



The greatest intellectual benefit I derived from the conference came from having to sit down and organize my thoughts on how to present integrative thinking and theory borrowing. As I began to put my presentation together, I found myself going back through content and ideas that I had not connected with in a number of years, as well as discovering new ideas. The result was a new model and some innovative curriculum connections that will definitely have lasting value for me.

The conference motivated me to

meditate on my career as a teacher and writer. I kept thinking that there are so many horizons to be explored connected to interdisciplinary studies. I left thinking: I need to get my thoughts out there in print and further cultivate my teaching and public speaking skills.

The AIS conference was a wonderful way for me to begin my new job in an Interdisciplinary Studies program. The sessions were inspiring and gave me new teaching ideas about everything from how to structure class discussions to how to integrate more science and art into my curriculum. The warmth of the attendees was like nothing I have experienced at an academic conference before. I was thrilled to meet so many wonderful and creative people!

$\Delta G < 0$ . That formula from the thermodynamics of chemical reaction sums up my experience of the conference. The free energy was very favorable for the spontaneous production of new structures and compounds. Translation: I got lots of new ideas and new friends out of this conference!

What really stood out for me, more than anything else, was how quickly new friendships were established. I'm looking forward to next year to see familiar faces and new ones as well.



### Job Posting

New College, a seminar-based program of interdisciplinary and integrative studies at The University of Alabama, is looking to hire a tenure-track faculty member in Interdisciplinary Arts, to be appointed Assistant Professor on August 16th, 2008.

More details and contact information about this job posting can be found in the Jobs in Interdisciplinarity section of the AIS Web site, <http://www.muohio.edu/ais/>.

# A student's perspective

## *AIS Conference offers opportunity to share experiences*

By Elsbeth Spelt, PhD Student in Higher Education, Education and Competence Studies Group, Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands.

This year was my first attendance to the AIS Conference as a graduate student. So far the AIS seems to me a friendly organization and this was also the case when I arrived in Phoenix, for the first time in the United States. Kelly, our hostess, warmly welcomes everybody and suddenly, by means of our name tags, anonymous hotel guests became AIS colleagues, which you could easily get in contact with. The conference was held in the Embassy Suites Hotel in Tempe and was well organized by Arizona State University in the name of Kelly Nelson and her colleagues.

The contributions to the conference can be roughly divided into two kinds: 1) sharing experiences in teaching interdisciplinarity, and 2) theorizing interdisciplinary teaching and learning. I visited both kinds for different reasons. I visited the "sharing experiences" presentations in order to obtain insight into the higher education system in the United States in general and regarding interdisciplinarity. The obtained insight is that the higher education system in the United States has some similarities, but also differences in comparison to the Netherlands and more exploration needs to be done by me for further clarification. With regard to interdisciplinary higher education, intention and struggles similar to my university were mentioned in the sessions. I also joined the "theorizing" presentations as this kind fits well with my graduate research work. These presentations were for me a nice opportunity to see the persons "behind" the books' chapters or articles on interdisciplinary teaching and learning I read at home. It was also very easy to get in contact with the presenter

and to ask questions or discuss about interdisciplinary teaching and learning. This also holds, by the way, for the board members of AIS; I really felt that they took care of us.

During the conference, there was an opportunity to have a look at books regarding interdisciplinary teaching and learning. And some of them, you could immediately buy as well. This seems to me very handy, because this gives you the possibility to determine whether a book will be suitable for you or not. As a result, I planned to order two books for my research, advising, and teaching activities on interdisciplinarity in higher education.

The special conference workshop named "The Nuts and Bolts of Integrative Syllabus Design" on Friday morning combines theories, best practices, and experiences in order to support lecturers with developing and/or teaching interdisciplinary programs or courses. The work of Allen Repko and colleagues, presented by Allen, on determining learning outcomes for interdisciplinary higher education has really excited me, since I took the same perspective for my own research on interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Hopefully my research work will obtain insights that can be used for this workshop in the following years.

The Guide Sessions on Saturday morning were organized to also get a better understanding of interdisciplinary education and have been for me a nice opportunity to hear the story of Bill Newell himself about his interdisciplinary efforts from the sixties in the last century until now. Beside this story, we also discussed several topics regarding teaching, curriculum, and course design.

A new element in the conference program was the roundtable discussion, organized and moderated by Roslyn Abt Schindler. In this roundtable session, "Preparing for a Future in the Academy and Beyond" several questions regarding this topic were discussed between graduate students and several seniors in the field of interdisciplinary research and education. This discussion has provided insight into, amongst others, opportunities for research funding and essential steps in job application. Furthermore, similar problems in comparison to my own university for funding and conducting interdisciplinary research were raised.

Surprisingly, the conference has also been for me the place to meet some Dutch colleagues, who I had never met before. Since these colleagues are involved in established interdisciplinary programs in the Netherlands, they were already high on my list to get in contact with to ask them for research possibilities in their programs. I am looking forward to continue our nice talks in the Netherlands.

Looking back, the conference is by definite a good and nice opportunity to meet others involved in interdisciplinary teaching and learning, which gives you at least the spirit to carry on with your interdisciplinary efforts at your own university or college, despite of all the struggles you might experience. But you can also learn a lot about how to arrange, manage, develop, and teach your interdisciplinary courses. I would like to end this article by thanking all of you to make the conference as it was this year. Hopefully see you next year!



# ***Interdisciplinarity and the Engaged Citizen: Integrating Higher Education, Public Policy, and Global Action***

**30<sup>th</sup> Annual Association for Integrative Studies Conference**

**Hosted by the University of Illinois at Springfield, October 23-26, 2008, in Springfield, Illinois**

Higher education today aims to create intellectually rich and culturally diverse campus environments that promote engaged and active learning and offer safe places to explore multiple perspectives. Moreover, higher education places itself at the forefront of public policy debates, efforts to define citizenship, and calls for societal change. Interdisciplinary and integrative problem-solving strategies can be actively employed to promote the kind of reflection, dialogue, and action on public policy and civic culture that result in informed engagement with the world.

To integrate interdisciplinarity and citizenship, we welcome proposals for papers, panels, workshops, roundtables, and creative presentations that address issues such as the following:

**Engagement and Knowledge Making:** theories of interdisciplinarity; epistemological conflicts and intersections in the academy and beyond; engaging the boundaries of disciplines; transdisciplinarity as engagement beyond the disciplines; new research and trends.

**Engagement and Public Policy:** intersections between liberal arts and public affairs; connections between higher education and public policy; interdisciplinary public policy issues surrounding issues such as health, the environment, and government at the local, regional, national, or international levels; debates surrounding the Spellings Commission; discussions regarding the future of higher education.

**Engagement in Teaching and Learning:** interdisciplinary approaches to general education, active learning, service-learning, or learning in majors or graduate programs; liberal arts and professional programs assessment of engaged curricula; interdisciplinary approaches to engaging the “other”; integrating undergraduate and graduate education; integrating P-12 and higher education; intersections between student affairs and academic affairs to promote engagement.

**Engagement and Action:** discussions about the role of higher education in promoting social or environmental justice and activism; interdisciplinarity and citizenship; interdisciplinarity and social or political problem-solving at different levels—local, regional, national, or global; engagement and online learning; integrating the academy and the community.

**Proposal Deadline: April 11, 2008**

**Look for our Conference Web site, <http://www.uis.edu/academicplanning/ais2008>**

(after December 1, 2007)



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