



Pittsburg State University

OFFICE OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT & STUDENT SUCCESS

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Subject: Final Report on Interdisciplinary Initiatives

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Attached is the final report resulting from the work of the task force. The task force spent considerable time during the 2011-2012 academic year assessing current state of affairs regarding interdisciplinary activity on campus, focusing on issues and inhibitors encountered by faculty members who lead those efforts.

At the end of the 2012 spring semester, the task force submitted an interim report and requested that we be allowed to extend our work on this project through the 2012 fall semester. We planned to undertake more in depth discussions of policy and process solutions for the inhibitors that were identified. The task force met six times during the 2012 fall semester to complete its work.

We now look forward to meeting with you to discuss the report after you have had time to review its contents. Thank you for your support on this project.

xc: Task Force members

Final Report of the Interdisciplinary Initiatives Task Force

January, 2013

Issue 1: Coordination among Departments

The issues that arise here include credit-hour distribution among departments and the assignment of operating funds (OOE) and other costs. In addition, interdisciplinary courses that are team-taught often require significant coordination among instructors and additional preparation time to initiate new instructors into the program. How are administrative support and compensation for faculty to be provided on both an initial and an ongoing basis?

Proposed Solutions

Course Level

1. A course prefix should be created for interdisciplinary courses (ID). Initially, a special topics course with this prefix should be created and used to pilot new offerings. If it becomes likely that the specific offering will become on-going, a specific course number should be proposed.
2. Credit hours generated through team-taught, interdisciplinary courses should be divided among, and assigned to, the instructors' home departments.
3. Funding should be made available to support the development and delivery of interdisciplinary courses. It must be recognized that these courses will not often substitute for a course in the major. Thus it is unlikely that departments will agree to offer them in load. Voluntary overload teaching in the current climate is not a viable option.

Degree Level

1. The Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS-) provides an existing, viable option for the creation of interdisciplinary programs at the undergraduate level. Creation of such a program at the graduate level should be explored.
2. While the BIS can serve as the degree structure for interdisciplinary programs, the University process for creating programs under the BIS needs to be streamlined, perhaps with general criteria approved by the faculty senate and a faculty advisory group approving new emphases with sign-off by deans whose resources could be affected.
3. Legitimate concern exists that creation of ID programs will divert some degree candidates from existing majors. In some instances departments could fail to reach KBOR minima. Our recommendation is thus that any degrees conferred through ID programs be credited to academic programs through a proportional scheme based on their participation in the program (e.g., departmental courses and faculty committed to ID

courses in the program). The PSU administration should inform the KBOR of such contributions if relevant to particular departments' failure to achieve prescribed minima.

4. A good start toward the process of adding degree programs would be to encourage the development of ID minors and certificate programs. These would provide good tests of student interests and avoid some of the barriers to creating full degree programs.
5. Directors of certificate, minor, and major programs ought to be formally appointed and charged with overseeing the program under the overall supervision of the Director of BIS. These directors should be given the time and resources to assure that such functions as program assessment and program promotion are carried out adequately.

Administrative Support

The potential for the success in interdisciplinary initiatives will be greatly enhanced through commitment of administrative support for such programs.

1. Creation of an ID Council to vet courses and programs and provide guidance to interested faculty would be one positive step. This group would be most effective if the Faculty Senate delegated authority to the Council on ID curriculum and course approval. A formal request should be made to the Senate regarding this issue.
2. Creation of a Director of -ID Programs would lead to more coordinated efforts across campus and serve as a point of contact for new initiatives and any future grant programs or other initiatives that may develop over time.

Issue 2: Interdisciplinary Courses and General Education

Some institutions have sought to initiate interdisciplinary courses through the general education (GE) program. When GE is involved, questions arise regarding:

- a. How will the course fit into a particular GE area to meet degree requirements?
- b. How will the course affect capacity/availability of other GE courses?
- c. Will faculty members be released to teach in-load or receive extra duty compensation (EDC)?

Proposed Solutions

1. The University anticipates a revision of its general education program in the next two to three years. We recommend that serious consideration be given to interdisciplinary approaches to general education with a focus on learner outcomes.

2. As an alternative to a new GE program approached completely from an ID perspective, a more limited number of ID courses could be developed with all students required to include one or two within their GE program.

Models exist (e.g., interdisciplinary science for non-majors) that could be explored as models for GE ID courses at PSU. We suggest that these models be investigated as GE revisions are discussed.

3. As long as ID courses are offered to fit the GE categories, -and class sizes take into account the assignment of two instructors, capacities in general education would not be affected. If pedagogical considerations prevent increasing course capacities or cause a greater “in-load” assignment of faculty members’ time, then additional resources will be needed. The Task Force recognizes that the University is not in a position to reduce GE capacity in order to introduce ID courses into the GE structure.
4. If ID courses are to become a serious, long term commitment of the University, that commitment is best reflected by assigning faculty ID work in-load. Otherwise, ID will always be perceived as being marginal and first to go in difficult financial times.

Issue 3: University Administrative Requirements

Issues here include expeditious approval and ongoing administration of interdisciplinary courses, and the proper vetting of new interdisciplinary courses and programs to assure they do not duplicate existing offerings. To assure the latter especially, existing procedures may be inadequate.

To address these problems, the Task Force proposes the following changes to university structures and procedures.

1. The Director of Bachelor of Integrated Studies (BIS) should be charged with oversight of Interdisciplinary Studies (ID) programs, be they certificate, minor, or major programs, or programs of a lesser range.
2. An Interdisciplinary Council reporting to the Provost should be created to advise the Director and to carry out additional duties listed below. This Council should be composed of six faculty members (two from Arts and Sciences, one from each of the other colleges and a department chair from an existing interdisciplinary program). The Council members should serve three-year rotating terms. The BIS Director should be an *ex officio* member. Members of this committee would be appointed by the individual deans (with the exception of the chair who would be appointed by the provost) and approved by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. If practicable, only members with experience in interdisciplinary programs and courses should be appointed to the Council.

3. The Council, with the approval of the BIS Director, shall:
 - a. Provide advice for those considering the development of ID courses or programs.
 - b. With approval of the college and university curriculum committees and the Faculty Senate, develop standards for ID courses and programs, and streamlined procedures for approval of such courses and programs. (This could be done by Senate's approving standards and delegating to the Council the implementation of those standards. This procedure is already in place for some existing ID courses and programs such as Honors, International Studies, and Women's Studies.)
 - c. Develop procedures and forms to implement the ID process agreed to by the curriculum committees and the Senate.
 - d. Review curriculum committee documents during the legislative process to assure proposed new courses or programs do not duplicate existing ID courses and programs.
 - e. Address other issues as needed with respect to ID courses and programs.

Issue 4: Technical Issues Related to Implementing ID Courses

Among the issues that require resolution under this heading are: Determination of course prefixes and identification numbers (from an existing department or new ID prefix be created); coordination with the Office of Information Services (OIS) to facilitate the implementation of programs or courses; resolution of any issues that may arise from sharing learning management system access between or among instructors must also be addressed.

Proposed Solutions

1. As noted in our solutions to Issue #1, a course prefix should be created for interdisciplinary courses. Visibility, perception that ID initiatives are a priority, and campus-wide buy-in are critical. We do not believe these will be gained through oversight within an existing academic department, but equitable allocation of credit (degrees, student credit hours, etc.) to existing, participating academic departments is essential for buy-in.
2. Implementation issues with OIS will need to be identified and addressed. These include allowing more than one instructor of record for grade entry, enrollment overrides, etc. when deemed appropriate by cooperating departments. These features will need to be put forth as a priority as the university considers a new student information system in the near future.

3. Since our Task Force began its deliberations, our new learning management system, Canvas, has been implemented and it has the features needed for shared LMS access by instructors.

Issue 5: Administrative Requirements of the Kansas Board of Regents

Several Regents' requirements make creating new interdisciplinary majors, minors, and certificate programs unattractive to potential stakeholders. The creation of a new major may undermine the ability of existing programs to meet the Regents' minimum number of graduates and majors. Thus, departments that would otherwise contribute to a new program as well as other departments may see these programs as a threat. The requirement that programs be assessed raises issues of what methods are to be used and places an additional burden on faculty and chairs.

Proposed Solutions

The major area of concern here is ensuring that existing academic departments receive credit for committing their resources to ID programs and courses. It will be important for University administrators who interact with Regents and Regents' staff to be strong advocates for such initiatives and the participating departments when these initiatives may, on the surface, negatively affect departments' ability to meet program review minima.

While BIS majors have at least three Ph.D. faculty that contribute to the major, almost all of the courses found in such degree programs are already part of the curriculum and do not normally require the addition of more sections to the schedule. Hence, BIS majors and other ID programs represent additional value to students and the state with at most minimal cost to the university. And they need to be accounted for administratively in this light.

Although under current rules, ID major programs themselves will be assisted in reaching minima by the fact that they are included under the BIS degree as part of a single major, the need for departments to meet Regents' minima for their own majors inhibits the development of ID programs, as noted above. Thus, the Task Force proposes that the BIS degree program be thought of simply as a convenient administrative designation, and that student enrollment and ID majors generated be credited to the contributing departments on a pro rata basis. This is the proposal the Task Force recommends that the administration advocate.

We also recommend that funds be allocated for a consultant to assist with BIS program review and assessment as is anticipated for other programs.

Issue 6: Fostering Interdisciplinary Initiatives between Faculty, Colleges and Departments

Often little or no exchange of information or ideas exists across colleges or even among departments within the same college. Thus, collaboration in course and program design is hard to effect, and advisers and others who could direct students to a course or program valuable to them may be unaware of it.

Proposed Solutions

Most of the following recommendations were included in our interim report last spring. The Task Force has reaffirmed these and added others. The recommendations follow:

1. Create a campus clearinghouse/database where faculty members can search for colleagues in other colleges and departments who share teaching, scholarship, or research interests.
2. Encourage the formation of other voluntary faculty groups along the lines of the Design Council to foster interdisciplinary collaborations.
3. Support the sharing of ideas that have potential for interdisciplinary collaboration through sponsorship of a variety of events. The first of these could perhaps be a campus forum to share the work of this Task Force.
4. Provide professional development and mentoring for faculty who wish to engage in interdisciplinary teaching collaborations, perhaps modeled along the lines of the e-Learning Academy.
5. Support faculty team visits to institutions with well-developed ID programs.