

Provost-Senate Task Force on Interdisciplinary Communities

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Provost-Senate Retreat

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Task Force Members

2018-19

- Ricky Bluthenthal
- Alex Capron (co-chair)
- Ewa Deelman
- Patrick Dent
- Kate Flint
- Jeffrey Gold
- Sofia Gruskin
- Julianna Kirschner
- Jennifer Lewis
- Doe Mayer
- Sheila Murphy (co-chair)
- Kenneth Neelson
- Hector Reyes
- Paul Rosenbloom
- Bill Swartout
- Holly Wills
- John P. Wilson

2017-18

- Antonio Bento
- Devon Brooks
- Alex Capron (co-chair)
- Ewa Deelman
- Patrick Dent
- Kate Flint
- Jeffrey Gold
- Marientina Gotsis
- Sofia Gruskin
- Norman Hollyn
- Doe Mayer
- Donna Spruijt-Metz (co-chair)
- Paul Rosenbloom
- John Slaughter
- Bill Swartout

Conceptual: “Interdisciplinary”

Multidisciplinary

- Engagement (perhaps sequential) of scholars from various disciplines
- May seek output that draws on results of analysis from several disciplines (“X perspectives on Y”: multiple ways of seeing)
- May address problems that lie between disciplines

Interdisciplinary

- Seeks answers to questions that do not have a disciplinary basis
- Requires interaction of scholars from multiple disciplines
- May be foundational (enriching epistemology of disciplines) or instrumental (solving a problem that a single discipline cannot solve {***Wicked Problems***})

Activities Affected

Education and Training

- Build on disciplinary education
- Knowledge is not best understood as separate silos
- Range of tools and methods that will be essential in tackling theoretical & practical problems

Separate task force on teaching

TFIC: *teaching as linked to research*

Research and Scholarship

- Some individuals with degrees in more than one field produce interdisciplinary scholarship
 - Use tools from other disciplines to answer disciplinary questions
 - Use tools of several disciplines to answer questions beyond discipline

TFIC: interested in collaborative activities of multiple researchers

Conceptual: “Communities”

Use the term to highlight multiple, important phenomena

1. Faculty and students coming together from different disciplines for ongoing conversation not aimed at joint product
 - Reading groups, seminars (often informal; typically not funded)
2. Activities that give rise to ongoing relationships and collaborations beyond a particular “project”
 - Institutes & centers MAY BE communities
3. “Dual Citizenship” for scholars in a diaspora
 - Preserving a sense of connection between department and faculty who work outside in centers based in other departments/schools

Barriers to Interdisciplinarity at USC

- “Interdisciplinary work is for people who aren’t good at their own discipline.”
- In appointment, promotion, and merit review processes, lack of understanding/respect for scholarship published outside the discipline [Not simply a problem of multiple authorship]
- Revenue center management [salary; overhead; space; bureaucracy]
- Tenure-track appointments based in departments, not centers
- Extra burdens for faculty appointed in multiple departments
- Lack of knowledge about faculty outside one’s own field
- Lack of leadership & unsure whom to contact or how to proceed
- Lack of interest (not relevant to one’s research interests)

What Makes Interdisciplinarity Possible?

- Funds (internal & external): recognition of the need
- Supportive leaders
 - More information about expertise and interest of faculty in other depts
 - “Matchmaking” and “publicity” functions
 - Cross-disciplinary funding for post-docs
- Knowledgeable administrators at all levels {overcome bureaucracy}
- Space for collaboration to take place {role of technology in a multi-campus institution?}
- Existence of problems that demand interdisciplinary approach
- Prior success: an existing “community”

TFIC Progress

- Existing literature (including multiple USC reports back to 1990s)
- Qualitative research: interviews with about 20 faculty
- Plans (hopes?)
 - Faculty-wide survey to provide broader data & mapping (by schools)
 - Relative success of disciplinary vs. interdisciplinary research proposals
- Your thoughts and suggestions?

Final thoughts

Perception vs. reality?

- As seen from offices of Provost, VP Research, VP Finance, Deans
- As seen from faculty

One size does not fit all

- Do not want an “ideology” (good scholarship is interdisciplinary vs disciplinary)

Thank you!

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