

College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences

Strategic Plan Working Draft

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

On April 8, 2009, the discussion group on interdisciplinary collaborations met and had a wide-ranging exchange. Thirteen faculty members attended, with eleven from the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences and two from the Waldron College of Health and Human Services. The group operated without any agenda in order to encourage the freest possible dialogue, but all members were in accord about the belief that interdisciplinary collaborations are an invaluable part of a meaningful collegiate education.

Below follow recommendations for the college strategic plan. They are not listed in any order of importance. Common themes did emerge in the course of the discussion, so similar items are grouped together.

- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should raise awareness about existing interdisciplinary programs and the value of interdisciplinary experiences for students and faculty.
 - Efforts at publicizing interdisciplinary efforts would raise the profile of such work in the university community, underscore its importance, and facilitate recruitment of students and faculty.
 - In particular, the central role of the college in the Core A curriculum should be stressed. Also, interdisciplinary programs should be represented at the Majors Fair. Coordination with the Admissions office and New Student Programs should be regular to help insure that prospective, and incoming, students are aware of the opportunity for interdisciplinary study. Finally, the Career Services Center could be involved to help students match employment opportunities with interdisciplinary programs of study.
 - Capstone experiences of an interdisciplinary nature should be promoted as essential ways for students to demonstrate the depth of intellectual understanding and interpretation that are at the heart of a liberal arts education.
- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should explore the creation of new interdisciplinary programs, courses, and experiences.
 - One way to insure the vigor of an interdisciplinary education is to build it. A special strength of interdisciplinary work, by its very nature, is that it lends itself to a variety of educational techniques and perspectives, and such efforts can occur inside and outside of the classroom.
 - The development of new interdisciplinary majors should be considered. Existing minors, such as International Studies and Women's Studies, might be elevated to that status. Or completely fresh initiatives might be taken that address the challenges of the modern world with a relevance and effectiveness that only an

interdisciplinary program of study could provide. For example, a major on sustainability would involve a program that cuts across disciplinary and college lines by involving, potentially, course work in the natural sciences, geography, sociology, philosophy, history, and other relevant fields.

- The college could support the development of interdisciplinary experiential learning. Internships with an interdisciplinary cast could be developed, and integrated into existing, or new, programs. Support for extracurricular field trips with an interdisciplinary aspect might receive emphasis in order to establish connections that students might not realize in the classroom setting alone.
- The college can advance the team teaching of courses by faculty who represent different disciplines. Team teaching presents the opportunity to expose students in a single subject area to different perspectives and instructional techniques. Yet developing a team taught course that is effective is not an easy task. The college could strive to support the development of team taught courses by allocating course relief and professional development funds to the creation of team taught courses. Also, the college should recognize that faculty who are teaching in a team taught course are teaching a full course load.
- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should improve collaboration with the professional programs in the other colleges at Radford University.
 - Specialization leads to great expertise, but also promotes the compartmentalization of knowledge and experience. Interdisciplinary collaboration seeks to surmount such barriers and promote new avenues of inquiry. One of the greatest divides that exists in academia is between programs that emphasize a specific program of professional study, and the liberal arts perspective that attempts to convey more universal values and skills.
 - Greater outreach to the professional colleges could be undertaken with the objective of enhancing professional programs of studies with relevant courses offered in the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences. For example, students in the School of Nursing already take courses in psychology and sociology, but the study of a foreign language or Appalachian culture, for example, could also assist them in patient care. Or similarly in the College of Business, students in the international finance track could benefit from foreign language instruction or other courses that help them to understand foreign cultures, and political and economic systems.
 - Research projects should be encouraged that involve collaboration between faculty in professional programs and those who are part of liberal arts programs. Of all areas of academic endeavor, research is focused on an individual's area of expertise. Yet too narrow of a focus can obstruct new insights and valuable criticism. Also, grant proposals can often be improved with interdisciplinary involvement. A study, for instance, that proposes to examine a local population, and is being conducted, perhaps, in the Waldron College of Health and Human

Services could benefit from a co-primary investigator or consultant who has knowledge of the local culture. Such collaboration does not spring up overnight, but the encouragement of conversations between colleges about research that has been conducted, or is contemplated, represents a starting point. The college could broaden the existing opportunities for faculty to share information about research projects across college lines.

- The cross-listing of courses in different majors in the College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should be explored.
 - The cross-listing of courses would encourage an interdisciplinary perspective, for a course, or select courses, in one discipline might used to satisfy a requirement in the major of another discipline in the college. All programs in the college could be examined to determine if the cross-listing of courses is appropriate.
- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should work with the University Registrar to have all classes that count towards an interdisciplinary program requirement listed in the Schedule of Classes for each upcoming semester.
 - Currently, the Schedule of Classes lists only courses for an interdisciplinary program that have a course prefix specific to a particular program. For example, only courses with a prefix of INST are listed for International Studies, or WMST for Women’s Studies. It would assist the interdisciplinary programs and be helpful to students, as well, if courses from other disciplines that fulfill the requirements of an interdisciplinary program, even though they have a different course prefix, were listed in the Schedule of Classes under the relevant interdisciplinary program.
- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences should establish a standing group to study interdisciplinary programs at other institutions and to facilitate the implementation of recommendations regarding interdisciplinary collaborations made in the college strategic plan.

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