

# Universal Interdisciplinarity:

A Compass and Guidebook for Academia and Beyond

By Sarah Hentges

Dedicated to students who make their paths through thick and thin,  
who emerge with scratches and scars ... and a commitment to something  
bigger than themselves.

and

To T.V. Reed, whose work in American Studies oriented  
me on my path and toward a whole new universe.

“‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ ... is one of my favorites of all the Hundred Poems, the ones our Society chose to keep, back when they decided our culture was too cluttered. They created commissions to choose the hundred best of everything. ... The rest was eliminated. Gone Forever. *For the best*, the Society said, and everyone believed because it made sense. *How can we appreciate anything fully when overwhelmed with too much?* ... (29)

“The government has computers that can do sorts much faster than we can, of course, but we’re still important. You never know when technology might fail.

“That’s what happened to the society before ours. Everyone had technology, too much of it, and the consequences were disastrous. Now we have the basic technology we need... and our information intake is much more specific. ... Such specialization keeps people from becoming overwhelmed. We don’t need to understand *everything*. And, as the Society reminds us, there’s a difference between knowledge and technology. Knowledge doesn’t fail us” (32).

—Ally Condie, *Matched*, a young adult dystopia novel/trilogy

# Contents

A note to students/readers. . .

About the Author: Toward a Context for This Book

“Universal” is Interdisciplinary: An Introduction

## **Part I: Calibrating the Compass**

Disciplines, Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary, Transdisciplinary: Some Introductory Concepts

Being a “Disciplinary” Student

Am I an Interdisciplinary Student?

Why Is Academia Divided into Disciplines?

Interdisciplinarity within and Beyond the Disciplines

What is Interdisciplinary Studies?

Interdisciplinarity and INT at UMA

What Can I “do” with Interdisciplinary Studies?

## **Part II: The Lay of the Interdisciplinary Land: Academia and Beyond**

Critical Thinking

Community, Reality, and Imagination

Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Interdisciplinarity

A Case for Social Justice

Where We Meet Science

Diversity, Feminism, and Critical Consciousness

## **Part III: Self-Discovery**

Who Am I?

What Skills and Qualities Do I Embody?

What Do I Like to Do?

What Do I Like to Study?

What Do I Want to Be When I Grow Up?

What Is My Relationship to Work?

Bringing It All Together & Taking It Out Into the World

#### **Part IV: Carving a Path: *Doing* Interdisciplinary Studies**

Annotating Your Map

Research: The Broad Model

Bias and Perspective: Best Practices

#### **Part V: Communicating Interdisciplinary Studies**

A Working Definition

The “Elevator Pitch”/Sound Bite

The Job Talk

The Statement

Creative Conceptualization

Putting It All Together & Taking It Out Into the World

#### **Part VI: Tools**

College Writing as Interdisciplinary Studies

Self-Care for the Mind and Body

An Endnote for Students and Readers

Works Cited

Other Interdisciplinary Resources

Acknowledgements

## A note to students/readers...

There are other books that offer an introduction to interdisciplinary studies. Allen Repko's (and co-authors) textbook *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* draws on over a decade of research and conversation about interdisciplinarity and provides much depth and breadth as well as a broad-based model for interdisciplinary research. Tanya Augsberg's book *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* is a great beginning point for your explorations of interdisciplinarity. I have used both of these books as the primary textbook in my Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course. I stopped using these books for several reasons. The biggest reason is the cost. I want to support other authors, but I don't want my students to have to pay \$85 to \$100 for a textbook that doesn't do exactly what I want it to do. Textbooks are usually big and thick and packed with too much information.

This book is something different.

It began as a guidebook for students who want to study between and among disciplines, consider knowledge as interconnected, and understand the world around us in all its complexities. It offers a way to think about your education as something that you can shape to your interests—not a rigid box that you have to fit into. This book gives you things to think about and activities to do, but it also covers some important ground for understanding interdisciplinarity.

I have put a lot of time and effort into creating this resource for students, but students will also contribute resources to our course. As a part of our work for this course, we will be exploring OERs—Open Educational resources. More and more professors are turning to these resources to help reduce the overall cost of education. However, there is also value in good old-fashioned books made of paper. (I love books. I have too many. I want my students to love books too!) Thus, I'll always ask students to purchase a supplementary/complementary book—in this case, the book that goes along with UMA's academic theme. When you are done with this book, you can gift it to someone who can also learn from it.

As I have left the expensive textbooks behind, this book has grown and evolved. Someday it might become a “real” book, but for now it is the starting point for our explorations in INT 208: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies. I highly recommend that students read a

plethora of other books—that’s kind of a requirement of being interdisciplinary. (Some resources are included at the end of this handbook for further reading.) You’ll want to read about interdisciplinary studies, but you’ll also want to read books that practice interdisciplinary studies—as well as those that are more disciplinary. More and more, any book/study has to position itself not only in its own discipline, but also in relation to other disciplines and to the larger world. This is a condition of the complex nature of our interdisciplinary world.

Interdisciplinary studies is not in conflict with disciplinary studies; there is a symbiosis. Interdisciplinarity can also enhance disciplinary work in a variety of ways—providing a different take, for example, or enhancing/creating connective tissues. Thus, this book also includes tools and skills that apply to a university education more generally, to an understanding of the institution of academia.

While INT 208 is the intro class for the Interdisciplinary Studies (INT) major, this course is also a requirement for the UMA Honors Program and a “theory and methods” option for students in Liberal Studies. It is, of course, open to any and all students. Most students who take this class agree that all students should be required to take INT 208. Why? Because in this class you learn things that are vital to your success as a student—things that you really don’t learn in other classes, but you are often expected to know. But most importantly, in this class you learn a lot about yourself. You have time and space to explore your interests while we also learn more about academia, why it is set up the way it is set up, and why it operates the way that it does. Why do you have to choose a major, check all the boxes, and get a piece of paper? Once you choose, are you stuck on that path forever?

This book wants you to be ready for a whole universe of complex worlds.

\*The Interdisciplinary Studies major is available on both the Augusta and Bangor campuses, as well as online. INT 208 is cross listed with HON 208 and is, thus, also a requirement for students in the Honors Program. This course can also be used to meet a requirement for Liberal Studies majors—the “methods of inquiry” general education requirement. Is it a surprise that this course is a gateway course for all of these different programs? (That’s a rhetorical question, but feel free to answer it!)

## About the Author: Toward a Context for This Book



For over a decade, I have used the title “Culture and Movement” to try to bring a coherence to my eclectic work. I created a website that has evolved and grown into a messy labyrinth as I try to connect all of the pieces of my work in and out of academia under this “Culture and Movement” umbrella. I don’t know that I have succeeded in this nearly impossible goal, but I persist none the less. In the fall of 2022, I was promoted to full professor—the last promotion I will have in this career! (sad but true)—and I requested a title change to better reflect that work that I do. As a Professor of Transdisciplinary Cultural Studies, I am attempting to make a statement about the nature of academic work as immediately relevant to the real world.

I am also attempting to create a job title that feels more authentic, because even though my PhD is in American Studies, Assistant, and then Associate, Professor of American Studies (a title that I chose when hired as a tenure-track professor in 2010) just never felt quite right. I almost created a title that would, as one former student teased me, need to wrap around my door several times. I settled for something a bit more compact though equally obtuse to most people—in and out of academia. Every day I dream about what a life outside of academia might look like but ultimately I stay because of the paycheck and health insurance, but mostly because I know that what I do matters. Through the INT major and the classes that I teach in Interdisciplinary Studies, American Studies, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, I have the opportunity and privilege to positively impact students’ lives. It would not even be a stretch to say that I transform students’ lives and I may even have saved a life or two. Some people say I’m not a



“real” doctor, but there are many shades to reality and what I do is powerful medicine—maybe even a little magic.

After I had composed this new introduction, something totally unexpected happened that not only created an opportunity to connect my work in academia more to the “real world” but also challenges me to build upon my transdisciplinary skills. For a long time I have been thinking about, and dreaming about, having my own fitness space to teach classes and to do my own thing, especially since taking the JourneyDance™ teacher training and teaching JD at the Bangor YMCA. I never really thought this would be possible, but then I found space that I think I can afford, and now I am building a business that I am launching in October in downtown Bangor: The Spiral Goddess Collective, a Center for Mind/Body Movement.

While I have many of the skills and much of the experience needed for this endeavor (like building a website, organizing and managing events, and teaching fitness classes), I have had to learn the skills needed to be a “business woman.” I have had to research how to start a small business and file paperwork with the state. I have had to develop marketing materials and a budget and learn how to use scheduling software. I have had to communicate with a variety of people who I will be working with and transition into new roles in the places where I have taught. I have had to call upon the many people who I have worked with throughout the last twelve years of living and working in Bangor for advice and assistance—and realized I had developed a whole network that I was able to draw support from. I am still learning and I am tapping into fields and disciplines where I have little to no experience. I don’t plan to leave my full-time job in academia, but we never know what the future may hold!

We never know when it is going pay off to be well-rounded and well-versed in a number of fields, disciplines, and approaches. When opportunities present themselves to do what we have always dreamed of, we want to be ready to answer that call. And, I believe that the more we put into the work that we love, the more fruits we will reap from it in the future.

Below is the “About the Author” description that I wrote back in 2015, when I first wrote this book for use in the inaugural Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course. I wrote it in third person because that seemed like the right approach at the time. Maybe it still is.

\*

Sarah's interest in interdisciplinarity began before she had language for it. As an undergraduate she explored a year in an interdisciplinary living and learning community at a private college before she transferred to Humboldt State University, where she majored in a self-designed program in Interdisciplinary Studies. Combining English, Sociology, and Women's Studies for a major in Literature, Gender, and American Culture, Sarah's academic future was set before she realized it was an available future.

She continued to build on her interdisciplinary education with a M.A. in Literature and Culture and a Ph.D. in American Studies that brought all of this previous education together. Combining comparative ethnic studies and women's studies, Sarah's dissertation explored interdisciplinarity through theories of consciousness and oppositional culture. Sarah also gained valuable teaching experience in comparative ethnic studies and American studies and has since worked in several interdisciplinary academic positions, including her current position at UMA. She has had the opportunity to design and teach a variety of interdisciplinary courses for more than a decade.

In addition to her academic work, Sarah has taught group fitness classes throughout her education, connecting with a wider community. These two worlds have come together over the past decade through an academic class, *American Fitness: Culture, Community, and Transformation*, and her second book, *Women and Fitness in American Culture*. This work continues to grow and has been reaching into new interdisciplinary connections with science, mindfulness, and yoga and she recently began teaching a class for the Nursing department about Integrative Healing Yoga.

Sarah's research, writing, and teaching are intimately linked and cover a range of topics that are considered and critiqued through American cultural studies and an interdisciplinary, intersectional lens. Her first book, *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film*, considers the coming of age story in films with girl protagonists. Her third book, *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature*, considers similar narratives in young adult dystopia. In between and overlapping with these books, Sarah's work considers hip-hop, education, social movements, consciousness, feminism, popular culture, Octavia Butler, integrative healing, embodied social justice, and intersections of identity and power.

These same topics are central to the many interdisciplinary courses that Sarah teaches in American studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies. Even her teaching in English reaches into the interdisciplinary elements of this discipline. She teaches a wide variety of courses from introductory courses to advanced seminars to capstones and internships. In these courses she aims to meet students where they are and to give them flexibility in their assignments. Students are encouraged to connect with material in multiple ways and to put ideas from class into practice. Sarah works to empower her students and equip them with critical, interdisciplinary tools.

This book is an extension of these goals, asking any student, and every student, to shape their education in a way that speaks to their interests and goals and works toward connection, integration, and transformation.

# “Universal” is Interdisciplinary: An Introduction\*

We live in an interdisciplinary world. Interdisciplinarity is not stagnant. It is changing. It may very well be that in another 30 years new disciplinary structures have arisen; or perhaps there will be none at all. *Universal Interdisciplinarity: A Handbook for Academia and Beyond* does not try to predict the future; it aims to provide ways to ride the wave of knowledge generally and navigate the structures of academia more specifically.

Thus, the “universal interdisciplinarity” here is science fiction, not simply an assumed applicability across all contexts.\*\* It represents the big picture of the universe—one that encompasses all kinds of ideas and practices. I want students to think about the bigger picture of their education—and the larger structure of education that they are shaped by. I want to empower students to shape their own educations.

I was an interdisciplinary studies student as an undergraduate and my graduate education was interdisciplinary through Literature and Culture and American Studies. I am a professor and believe deeply in the power and potential of education of all kinds. I advise students who are creating their own majors, combining classes from a variety of programs to shape something new. I am working to make a path for this process, a path that anyone can follow. I had no defined path when I began. I stumbled around, bumped against barriers and skirted sharp edges. Learning is a messy, sometimes painful process, but it is also a process of growing. It doesn’t start with being a student, and it doesn’t stop with graduation.

There are many opportunities to pursue education beyond high school (or while still in high school!). Self-study as life-long learners is one way (and one of the perks of being a professor). Apprentice work or volunteerism is another. Two-year and four-year degrees can be pursued through a variety of educational institutions. Technical colleges and professional studies programs can be a direct line into a profession and a particular niche in the work force. Traditional liberal arts colleges provide myriad opportunities for a well-rounded education. This book is about education within the context of undergraduate higher education—one path that is both wide and narrow at the same time.

This book, I hope, points the way to and through education and toward building something enduring for each student. It aims to meet you where you are. It takes you where you want to go, or where you need to go. It offers tools for academia and beyond.

I am still learning about the ways that academia works. As a student I had no idea what academia was all about. I just wanted to learn. Until I was enrolled in a PhD program, I had not really considered that I might be a professor. I didn't think of this as a job. I want students to know more about academia so that they can help to shape the structure for themselves and future students.

“Universal interdisciplinarity” also resonates with a larger responsibility to our communities—on and off campus. Our communities are looping and overlapping and our campus (physical or virtual or embodied) should serve the needs of our students in many aspects of their lives. Additionally, we should be serving the members of our communities that do not have the privilege to attend an institution of higher education.

This book asks us to imagine that “beyond” academia there are possibilities that are also interdisciplinary in nature. The universe is all kinds of interdisciplinary. And interdisciplinarity is universal because it is everywhere.

\*My students tell me that they rarely read introductions. The introductions—as well as the prefatory materials at the front of books and the resources and appendices at the back of books—can tell you much about what's inside a book.... and can give you an idea of the book's main ideas more quickly. Intros can also help you get more out of a book. So, always read the intro and at least scan through all the parts of the book! But, officially, read every single word your professor assigns to you!

\*\*There are certainly contexts where the “universal” does not fit and where this idea has been used to erase ideas and cultures, if not also lives. However, the basic idea of interdisciplinarity—an integration of perspectives and practices to fit the needs of a particular context—means that generally, interdisciplinarity is universal. And it changes.

## Part I:

# Calibrating the Compass

Interdisciplinarity is a complicated and contested idea, definition, and practice, but it is also the reality of knowledge and the development of increasingly interdisciplinary programs that meet the demands of our complex world.

There are many ways to introduce interdisciplinarity. You've already had several introductions!

# Disciplines, Multidisciplinary, Interdisciplinary, Transdisciplinary: Some Introductory Concepts

**Disciplinary:** A discipline is “any comparatively self-contained and isolated domain of human experience which possesses its own community of experts” (Nissani 1997 as quoted by Augsburg 42). “. . . perceived to be ‘self-contained’ with ‘rigid’ disciplinary boundaries” even when they cross-over with other disciplines and create new combinations (42).

**Multidisciplinary:** “signifies the juxtaposition of disciplines. It is essentially additive, not integrative” (Klein 1990 as quoted by Augsburg 42).

**Interdisciplinary:** Often used as “an umbrella term for all types of bridging between disciplines” (42). Interdisciplinarity “connotes synthesis and integration” (43) “relies on disciplinary knowledge insofar as it draws from multiple disciplinary insights in the process of identifying, evaluating, and solving problems” (48). Might be instrumental, conceptual, critical, wide or narrow. (51-2)

**Transdisciplinary:** “problem-focused with an emphasis on joint problem solving at the science, technology, and society interface that goes beyond the confines of academia” (47)

and/or “relies more on theories, concepts, and approaches that literally go beyond or transcend disciplines” (49).

Perhaps the list of words in this title and all of the above definitions (which are all quoted from Tanya Augsburg’s *Becoming Interdisciplinary*) just made your head spin a little bit. Maybe your head exploded. I hope not. It’s important to put these words out there before we go much further so that we have a basic understanding to build from. And, let’s also acknowledge that we are speaking an academic language here. These are words that we use in the ivory tower, but there are similar concepts in real-life and sometimes those concepts helps us understand the academic concepts better.

First, a discipline might be considered as a single subject like the ones we studies in elementary school: math, science, English, music. Disciplines are, of course, more complicated than this, and we will dig more into this shortly, but let's just keep it there for now.

Sidebar: We might also recognize one of the most common phrases when we engage in interdisciplinary studies: it's complicated! Interdisciplinary studies doesn't make the world more complicated. The world is complicated on its own. Interdisciplinary studies gives us a way to approach that complexity. But, I digress (which is also common in interdisciplinary studies!).

Let's consider a discipline to be like a piece of fruit. For instance, an orange is all the same color. When we peel the orange there are different textures and some of it is edible and some of it is not. But it is all an orange. There are different varieties of orange (Cara Cara, Sweetie, Navel), but they are all generally the same basic structure and flavor and even the color is generally, well, orange.

Next, let's consider multidisciplinary. Multidisciplinary is like a bowl of fruit. The general education classes that a student takes are multidisciplinary. They are math and a lab science, English 101, a fine arts class, a bit of history or language, some social science, a computer class, a communications class. These classes impart specific skills as well as an array of the fruits that are available to dig into more deeply. In our bowl of fruit we have different shapes and size and varieties of fruit. There are some we like more than others, some that ripen more quickly, and some that seem to be merely decorative. Some fruits are more common and we eat them every day and some are more exotic and unfamiliar and maybe we never eat them at all.

We could also consider multidisciplinary to be like a fruit salad. A Liberal Studies major might be like a fruit salad; an engaged student combines the fruits in the bowl into a more nuanced and parsed combination. We cut up the fruit, but all of the pieces are still recognizable. The flavors might start to mix together a bit and we can eat several different kinds of fruit in one bite, but they still remain individual and indistinguishable. Some fruits go better together and are often found in combinations. Like History and English—we really can't understand a novel outside of its historical context.



Interdisciplinarity is my favorite form of fruit—it is the smoothie. Here, we can throw all of our favorite fruits into a blender and create something new!

# Being a “Disciplinary” Student

“Rather than view knowledge as certain and held by authorities, interdisciplinary students—in order to reconcile and synthesize the differing disciplinary and nondisciplinary worldviews—must believe that knowledge is relative to a context and acquired through inquiry” (xiv).

—Carolyn Haynes, *Innovations in Interdisciplinary Teaching*

If the title of this section sounds awkward, that’s because we really never refer to students in this way.

Students often choose a major because of a perception that they have formed based upon assumptions and stereotypes (or parental or societal pressure) that may or may not be true. For instance, a student might want to be a lawyer and think that Pre-Law or Criminal Justice are the best majors for this path; however, students are admitted to law school from just about every major, according to the [American Bar Association](#). Many experts would actually recommend that History, English, Philosophy, and the Arts and Humanities best prepare students for law school (this is where the [highest average LSAT scores](#) come from!) as well as Business, Political Science, Economics, Math, and Science, or Sociology and Psychology ([source](#)). There are a lot of different kinds of law to practice and the Humanities prepare students with a lot of reading and the most important skill: critical thinking. We’ll be coming back to this point later.

Most students don’t really know a whole lot about the major they have chosen and they don’t really know a lot about how that major relates to other majors and other fields of study. Many students are unsure what major they should choose and many students change majors several times. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, “about 80% of students in college end up changing their major at least once” and “on average, college students change their major at least three times over the course of their college career” ([source](#)). This is as true at UMA as it is at any other university.\*

Many students struggle to choose, and many students drop out because they can’t complete a certain requirement or because they can’t afford to take any more classes. Many students leave college with a bunch of credits that seem to be leading nowhere. Many students

come to UMA with a lot of credits that don't seem to add up. These students are often slotted into a "Liberal Studies" degree because this is a highly flexible degree, considered an "adult degree completion" degree because it can accommodate a wide variety of credits and there are very few actual requirements beyond general education (which every college student takes) and a minor. This major goes by different names at different universities, but the principle is the same. A similar degree is the Applied Science major at UMA. Students are admitted to this major with a certain number of previously completed credits and/or an Associate's degree. From there, the requirements are pretty loose. And what's the difference between Liberal Studies and Applied Science? Not as much as you might think. . . .

Ultimately the discipline or major that a student chooses is less important than the degree itself. Many employers don't really care what a student majors in, they only care that the student went to college. Why? Well, there are a lot of reasons, and we'll explore these more throughout this book and this course. And, of course, there are some degrees that absolutely do matter. You're not going to get into medical school if you've never taken any science classes, for instance. Likewise, you're not going to get into graduate school in an English program if you've only ever taken ENG 101. And you're not going to be a nurse without a Nursing degree or a teacher without taking Education courses. There are good reasons why academic specialization exists and degree programs and paths are designed toward particular professions. But, in the majority of fields, there is not a simple path from degree to profession. For instance, many students choose the Business major because it seems to scream success, but there is no guarantee that a business degree leads to any particular job, successful or not.

While there may be less and less importance placed on the subject of a student's degree, it is not just our highly competitive workforce that determines the value of a degree. Many students think: what is the point of a college education? And what is the point of the piece of paper if the subject doesn't really matter? These are good questions and they form the basis of what this class is all about. From my very biased perspective I often argue that the INT major provides students with a major that is meaningful personally, academically, and professionally. It not only provides the foundational skills that are needed to be successful in the work force or in graduate school, but it also provides a sense of meaning. Because students design their major, it can be just about anything they want it to be and it can take them just about anywhere they want

to go. No college degree is a magical pass to employment, to success, or to the fulfilment of dreams and ambitions.

There are reasons to be a “disciplinary” student and even when you are, you are still also interdisciplinary in ways that you cannot avoid as a person who functions in a complex world. But even if you have a narrow major, you can still hone and enhance your interdisciplinary skills and make yourself more well-rounded and a more appealing candidate for a job or a grad school program.

\*I had a very firm idea of what my major was going to be in college, but as I changed from a private university to a public one, I chose interdisciplinary studies as a major because the English major was too narrow and my prior credits didn’t fit well anywhere. So, even the most focused students have to change their minds and majors sometimes.

# Am I an Interdisciplinary Student?

“Interdisciplinary studies allow me to look at complex problems from different world views, through the lens of different disciplines. Then I can take those different perspectives and integrate them to create effective solutions to those problems.”

“Interdisciplinary studies allow me to think differently about problems that may arise in my life and my field of work. It gives me the tools to integrate ideas and think critically about information. It opens my studies to freely flow in the direction that is best suited for my life goals.”

“INT studies will help me build a better understanding of where I want to have more focus on my field of study. Integrating nutritional health science, mental health and sociology will help me be more well-rounded in my field instead of being focused on one particular subject. It will also give me advantages to solve, create, analysis every situation that might be thrown at me in my field.”

“Interdisciplinary studies allows me to create a broader base of knowledge by using different pieces of knowledge from many disciplines. By creating a broader base of knowledge instead of a narrow or tunneled knowledge base, I am also actively using non-traditional ways to solve problems by thinking outside of the box.”

“Interdisciplinary studies allows me to incorporate every skill, strength, and value I have into a career path. As a society, we have learned that when presented with a social problem, there is rarely ever a definitive solution or answer. Interdisciplinary studies allows us to make connections between social problems, research the ways in which the problems intersect and then provide solutions using several approaches.”

—From INT Students from INT: 208 in 2017

Pretty much every student at an American university is an interdisciplinary student. What you study and how you study it depends upon your interests and goals as well as the ways in which your institution is organized and the programs of study that are offered.

Most degree programs at liberal arts colleges require students to have general education, which is meant to provide students with a solid foundation of knowledge necessary to be a well-rounded student and an informed member of society. This multidisciplinary approach to

education sometimes offers interdisciplinary opportunities. Many disciplinary programs also offer opportunities for “narrow” interdisciplinary within the program.

The real question here is whether you want to be an interdisciplinary studies student, in a program that has either been designed to cross disciplinary boundaries or a program that you design that combines and crosses disciplines. In both types of programs, integration is key. Students learn to make connections, to weigh evidence, to apply theories, to recognize patterns, to distill important points, to synthesize knowledge, and to think critically and contextually.

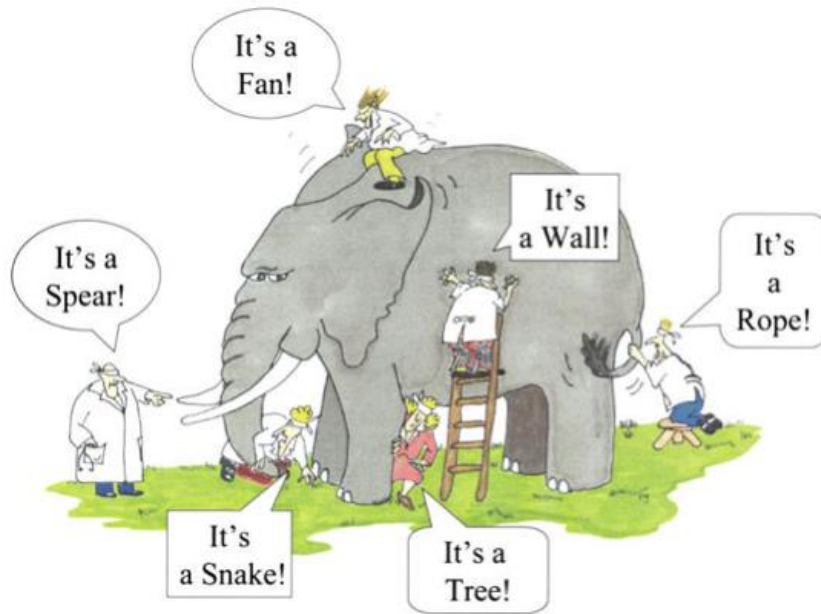
The building blocks of education are similar, but the arrangement of these blocks is more flexible than we are taught to think. While early education is more interdisciplinary, public schools in the U.S. quickly compartmentalize subjects—then they measure and evaluate based upon standardized expectations. A similar standardization shapes higher education as well.

Opportunities for interdisciplinarity are offered at every level of education, particularly in more privileged or experimental spaces. At the university level, undergraduate and graduate education practices are regulated by standards that may be more adaptable than secondary education but the general shape is the same.

The rigid disciplinary structures of education meet their purpose (socialization, normalization, social control). But what if the purpose of education isn't as simple as a cookie-cutter? Our world is complex and messy. What if we want our cookies to have more texture, more flavor, and less uniformity?\*

\*If you haven't figured it out already, Interdisciplinary scholars love food metaphors.

# Why Is Academia Divided Into Disciplines?



Disciplines approach questions, problems, and issues from a particular perspective, approach, and ideology. Academia is divided into disciplines, in part, because there is so much to know—so much that has been thought, reasoned, written, figured, measured, postulated, and written—that we need a way to approach the complex world we live in. However, disciplines are rooted in history and have evolved.

As Repko, Szostak, and Buchberger explain in *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*, when we take a Western view of the development of academia and interdisciplinarity, the term “discipline” dates back to the ancient Romans and the term *disciplina*. The use of this term was narrow and applied only to specific professions like law and medicine, while professions like those in agriculture, mechanical or military engineering or theater were not considered disciplines and were not taught in the universities that existed during Roman and medieval times. Further, outside of the professions, “all students received the same broad general education” (27). It wasn’t until the twentieth century that professions became a part of the curriculum at universities in the Western world. (Repko, et al. 27)

In many ways, the story of how the disciplines developed is one of an increasing professionalization of knowledge and a need for specialization since “it became increasingly difficult for any one person to keep abreast of more than one field of inquiry” (28) during the

Scientific Revolution that took place from around 1500 to 1700. During this time, an “insistence on testing theories through careful observation or experimentation” (28) became the norm and tried and tested observations became accepted knowledge and bodies of theory further developed, we needed some way to organize all of this knowledge. Between 1750 and 1800 new, “revolutionary learning techniques” helped to codify the production of knowledge and the profession of teaching: “writing, grading, and examinations” (28). From there, the seminar (originating in German universities circa 1760), the laboratory (in France before the revolution), and the classroom (in Scotland around 1760) were all developed and borrowed and the doctorate originated in Berlin in the early 1800s and was adopted at Yale and other American universities shortly thereafter and then into Canada in 1900 and the U.K. in 1917. (Repko, et al. 28)

Repko, Szostak, and Buchberger summarize all of this: “The university and the disciplines became an engine of knowledge production that far outstripped any other method of learning devised by any previous civilization” (28). Let’s pause here for a moment to consider just how much the production of knowledge has structurally stayed the same over the last 200+ years and how much more knowledge has been produced. This enterprise is quite staggering and it is no wonder that “these practices have been so successful that today they are used the world over” (28). Of course, things have changed. Categories have shifted and “disciplines arose to address new social conditions” (28); new specializations have formed (29), dependence upon scientific research has grown (30), new technologies have developed, links between “industry and education” have influenced funding and development, and at one time the humanities were valued as they were “called upon to celebrate the inheritance of ‘Western Civilization’” (30). And, of course, “disciplines slowly evolve over time as new research questions, theories, and methods are embraced” (31).

And, of course, interdisciplinarity has also developed . . . but before we go there, let’s consider how this great enterprise has impacted not just universities, the production of knowledge, and the professionalization of knowledge, but how these ideas have trickled down into all levels of education and how these foundations shape not only our systems of education in U.S., but our very way of seeing the world.

As the enterprise of academia has become more expansive, specialization has become a norm that is both beneficial and problematic at the same time. Specialization allows individual



scholars to dig deep and for disciplines to be focused in ways that are productive and efficient. But, it also means that as individuals and disciplines become more specialized, they become more closed off and less likely to consider ideas, theories, perspectives, and approaches outside of their field of specialization. We sometimes refer to “academic silos” to explain this phenomenon—each discipline/department/branch is like a silo where the contents are contained and separated from contaminants, for instance.

There are plenty of good reasons why education has been organized around the concept of disciplines. We human beings like to categorize and simplify; we like to put things into boxes so that they are easier to understand. Disciplines have their own practices, methods, ideologies, values, assumptions, and ... even when there are conflicts within a discipline—and there are always conflicts within (and across and between) the disciplines.

As we progress from grade school to higher education the boxes become more complicated.

In K through 8 subjects might look like: math, science, reading, writing, social science, and music (if we’re lucky). These may or may not have different teachers, different spaces, or different pedagogical approaches.

In high school subjects might look like: algebra, biology, English, history, psychology, and drama (if we’re lucky). We might have opportunities to study history and literature together or to choose electives or skill-based classes.

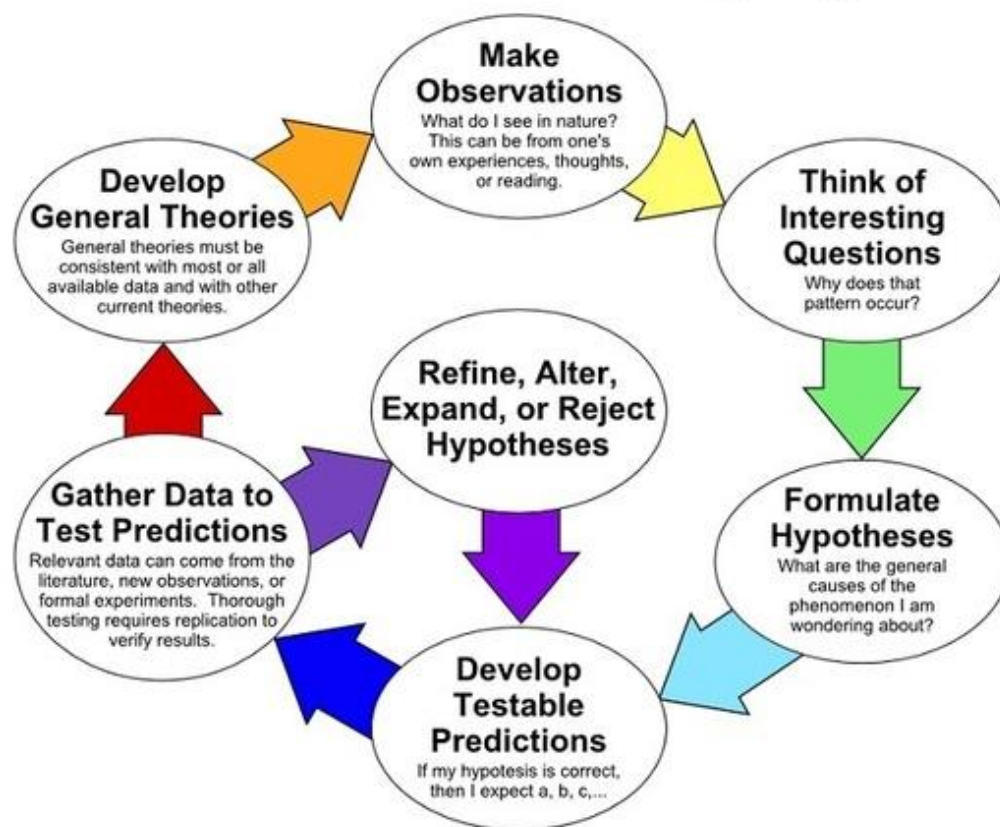
In some educational spaces these categories are challenged, whether out of a principle for experiential learning, or an opportunity for advanced study, or out of necessity. Some private schools and charter schools re-think the entire purpose, function, and vision for education.

At the college level, these subjects become general education categories and majors and vary widely from one university to the next. Some stay in their boxes while others push the boundaries. Regardless, at most American universities you can major in English or Biology or Psychology or Business or Art or Computer Science, even if these majors are found under different names or categories. Disciplinary structures may look and function differently at the undergraduate level, the graduate level, and the level of the profession. They maybe become silos of specialization where we survive the cutthroat world of academia by finding a niche so

obscure and rich that we can bury ourselves and build our careers. Innovation happens when there is the energy, impetus, and institutional support for such endeavors. But in our culture, and in our educational system, we differently value the disciplines and assign resources, privilege, and prestige accordingly. A hierarchy structures the disciplines and often determines the ways in which the politics of universities are structured.

Generally, Science is seen as the top of the food chain. This is where the real work of academia is done; it is the realm of so-called objectivity. Science is measurable and predictable and replicable. This is where lives are saved by the development of new medicines and medical procedures. This is where we figure out how to genetically engineer our food and manufacture chemicals and produce technological advances that advance the human race. This is where we partner with big business and government. This is where the funding goes. Breakthroughs are made all the time, but the basic building blocks of ideas remain static, objective, and logical. Findings can be graphed and proofed. There is always a “right answer.”

## The Scientific Method as an Ongoing Process



The Social Sciences is where “soft” science happens. To real scientists there is little that is “real science” about Social Science. Sociologists, psychologists, and economists also observe, predict, measure and chart their color-coded findings with increasingly sophisticated software. Social scientists help develop policies in government and industry, education and other institutional settings. They might also save lives though in less obvious ways. They critique and create and improve systems and structures. Here is where we study peoples, cultures, products, places. We sometimes relay upon stories (qualitative research) as evidence of what needs to change or what we need to develop to do better.

And then there are the Humanities. Social scientists like to think that what they do is somehow more legitimate—more objective, structured, reasoned—than what scholars in the Humanities do. In the Humanities we do different things with culture, things that the social scientists do not always approve of. We ask questions, poke holes, trace the development of ideas, and celebrate the value of the written word as a means of recording and expressing the experiences of human beings across time and place. We understand the value of stories as pieces of art and culture and we study the ways in which stories reflect back to us who we are. In the Humanities we get to the very heart of what we do and why we do it and imagine ways that we might do things better and create new ideas and visions. As noted earlier, the Humanities were once the cornerstone of Progressive education and were called upon to educate U.S. citizens in all of the glories of Western Civilization. The interdisciplinary field of American Studies has origins in these tides of American exceptionalism as well as in the counter culture of the 1960s and 70s. Each of these disciplinary areas serves a shifting purpose according to power and politics, even the sciences (which are seen as being the most “objective”) and the social sciences (which are seen as being objective enough to inform policy at the highest levels). But the findings of both science and social science can be manipulated as easily as the Humanities.

At the bottom of the food chain, the first to get cut when budgets are cut and priorities are shuffled, is the Arts, or the fine arts. This is where music, theater, and art reside. This is where the beauty of the human experience is explored and exploded. In the arts, certain skills are developed and we might argue that people who pursue the arts need to have a certain kind of talent—an eye for beauty, refinement, and certain motor skills required for drawing or painting, for instance, or a certain voice for singing or a strong and flexible body built for dancing. The

Arts is where political actions seep into entertainment. The value of the artists goes beyond the shows they create. As Shoshona Currier, Director of the Bates Dance Festival, argues, “Their work resonates throughout society in critical and creative thinking, collaborative work environments, problem-solving, dreaming. Artists change space.” The arts harness creativity, beautify spaces, and give us reflections of ourselves. Such contributions are hard to quantify.

The further down we get in the hierarchy, the more dangerous these disciplinary structures are to the status quo and power-over structures. Art cannot be contained and controlled in the same way that the sciences can. The ways in which people are moved by the Arts is unpredictable. Human emotions can be swayed. This is scary for people in science and social science where they like things measured and weighed and clear and simple even when the phenomena being studied are complex and multifaceted. This is a threat to the powers that be.

There are aspects of disciplines that don’t fit neatly into one category and often float depending upon the institution. For instance, communications is located in both the Humanities and the Social Sciences at UMA, partly a result of innovations in the field that have moved it toward social science even as the art of public speaking and the faculty who teach it have remained in a different disciplinary construct. History is also sometimes seen as a part of the Humanities or a part of the Social Sciences depending upon institutional structures, approaches, and expectations. Further, language could be seen as a kind of science through the study of linguistics, but it can also be seen as a study of culture and history. Writing is a fine art, but it is housed with the English major, which is seen as the backbone of the Humanities. These are only a few examples of the problems of disciplinary categorization.

Another problem arises as higher education pushes more and more toward career preparation, field-specific skills, and post-graduation job placement. Many of the disciplines above are jettisoned from educational models with such goals. Who has time for arts and literature, or even for a deeper understanding of human systems and structures when there are important things to do like learning to draw blood or build bigger buildings. But it is within many of these fields where we find functional interdisciplinary or transdisciplinarity at work. Further, the “helping professions” draw from social science and science but rarely see themselves as interdisciplinary.

While my simplistic (and cynical) accounting of the disciplines may overgeneralize the ways in which disciplinary politics operate, these foundational beliefs influence the ways in which we learn, teach, connect, grow, and move forward as a culture, a country, a world. The ways in which interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary projects and program evolve are based upon the assumptions of these disciplinary structures and are contained and shaped by them.

Despite their long-standing consistency as categories, disciplines are not static. But even as these disciplines combine and recombine, even as they branch off and diversify, disciplinary structures continue to shape our understanding of what we do—in and beyond academia. While categorizing and simplifying ideas, phenomenon, observations, critiques, and knowledge into disciplines can be helpful, such organizational structure does not match the complexity and messiness of the world that we live in.

One version of a chart of disciplines might look like this:

Science	Social Sciences	Humanities	(Fine) Arts
biology, chemistry, genetics, oceanography, environmental science	psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, communications, geography, political science  [history, religious studies]	English, philosophy, history, language(s), drama (as genre), rhetoric, religious studies  [American studies, women's studies]	painting, drawing, ceramics, theater arts (drama, acting, playwriting, screenwriting), photography, print-making, creative writing, mixed media, architecture, music

Where do things like engineering get slotted? Where does math fit? How about cultural studies? Business? What doesn't fit in these categories? Why do some things fit into more than one category? Where do interdisciplinary fields or professional studies fields fit? What's left out?

Another version of this chart might look like this:

Science & Interdisciplinary Sciences	Social Sciences & Human Services	Humanities & Cultural Studies	Fine & Performing Arts
biology, chemistry, genetics, oceanography, environmental science, math, nursing, neuroscience, psychoneuroimmunology, forensics, robotics, engineering	psychology, sociology, economics, communications, anthropology, geography, mental health and human services, criminal justice, education, political science	English, philosophy, history, language(s), drama (as genre), rhetoric, religious studies, American studies, women's studies, gender studies, queer studies/LGBTQ studies, area studies, indigenous studies/Native American studies, African American studies, Black studies, Latinx studies/Chicano studies, Asian American studies, world religions	painting, drawing, ceramics, theater arts (drama, acting, playwriting, screenwriting), photography, print-making, creative writing, mixed media, architecture, music

Still, there are contradictions. All of the studies of racial and ethnic groups, for instance, or culture more generally, could just as easily fit under the umbrella of social science as they could under the umbrella of humanities. Further, different language can be used for the same general area of study. So, perhaps it is not so much what is being studied as how it is being studied.

A chart like this might lend further insights into why and how we categorize certain areas of study together as “disciplines”:

	Science	Social Sciences	Humanities	Fine Arts
<b>what is studied?</b>	data, concrete materials, observable and measurable phenomena: animal, mineral, chemical	Data, people's actions and reactions, institutions, social theories, Politics, the work of famous and influential social scientists	words, texts (written and visual and more), linguistics, representations, patterns, ideas, cultural politics, the canon of great literary works, the writings and lives of	techniques, approaches, past examples of artists, artistic and cultural movements, buildings,

		(Freud, Durkheim, Weber, etc.)	authors and influencers, actions and reactions of people, cultures, and societies; political strategies	designs, cultural politics
<b>Methods (how is it studied?)</b>	quantitative, measurements, the scientific method, probability	qualitative and quantitative analysis, statistical analysis	textual analysis, critical analysis	critique, analysis
<b>meaning of “theory”</b>	A testable hypothesis or model; carefully thought out explanation for observations of the natural world constructed using the scientific method  Examples: evolution, germ theory of disease, theory of relativity, quantum field theory	An idea about how something works; can be tested and measured and understood objectively  Examples: Structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, conflict perspective, feminism.	An examination and critique of society and culture; attempts to understand aspects of ourselves. “Critical Theory”  Examples: feminism, Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, reader-response, new criticism, deconstruction, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, postmodernism*.	Attempts to understand the “essence” of art  Examples: abstraction, expressionism, formalism, mimesis, minimalism, naturalism, romanticism, symbolism.
<b>guiding ideas/schools of thought</b>	Objectivity is absolutely possible; Either it is or it isn’t and it isn’t until it can be proven through studies that produce replicable results	Objectivity is desirable and should be a guiding principle	Objectivity is impossible; there are always grey areas; reading between the lines, critical thinking	Art is creative personal expression; art is creative personal expression that reflects social and cultural contexts and messages

Still, there are generalizations and contradictions here. We might further consider that there are many fields that cross across these lines as well as many divides within these lines. For instance, within each of these four categories, we have people working in these fields who would consider themselves to be activists—using their resources to influence progressive social change,

while in the same field there are also traditionalists who believe in a purity of approach and think that “Politics” have no place in the university. Note that the word politics appears in several places above: as a field of political science, as Politics (with a capital P), as cultural politics.

Part of the reason why this is all so complicated is that there are different kinds of interdisciplinarity; we might even argue that interdisciplinarity is the natural state of the world and that disciplinary thinking is just an arbitrary structure that we have laid over the world to make it easier to understand. Thus, as academia evolves and grows the lines get more and more difficult to draw, while at the same time it becomes more and more necessary to draw them.

Are you still with me?

**Create your own chart for each of the four disciplinary areas that details what you know right now about each of these disciplines:**

Science	Social Sciences	Humanities	(Fine) Arts
biology, chemistry, genetics, oceanography, environmental science	psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, communications, geography, political science  [history, religious studies]	English, philosophy, history, language(s), drama (as genre), rhetoric, religious studies  [American studies, women’s studies]	painting, drawing, ceramics, theater arts (drama, acting, playwriting, screenwriting), photography, print-making, creative writing, mixed media, architecture, music
What I know about science:	What I know about social science:	What I know about humanities:	What I know about fine arts:
How I know what I know about science:	How I know what I know about social science:	How I know what I know about humanities:	How I know what I know about fine arts:
My skills in science include:	My skills in social science include:	My skills in humanities include:	My skills in fine arts include:



--	--	--	--

**Now, before we leave this endeavor and exercise in understanding disciplinarity behind, add one more row to the bottom of your chart. Consider the resources gathered by you and your classmates and expand your chart:**

What I have learned about science from our research	What I have learned about social science from our research	What I have learned about humanities from our research	What I have learned about the arts from our research

Now that we have a better grasp on the disciplines, we can explore the ways in which interdisciplinarity happens within and beyond these disciplinary areas. Before we do so, you might reflect upon what your charts reveal about each of the disciplines as well as the relationship between these disciplines. Does your experience in, and in between, each of these areas mesh with my “cynical” rendering of the hierarchy of the disciplines? Why or why not? What do each of the disciplines contribute to the enterprise of higher education? Where do they potentially overlap? Where do they clash?

# Interdisciplinarity Within and Beyond the Disciplines

The Defining Characteristics of Interdisciplinary Terms (Augsburg 49):

**Multidisciplinarity:** juxtaposing, sequencing, coordinating, adding

**Interdisciplinarity:** integrating, interacting, linking, focusing, blending, synthesizing

**Transdisciplinarity:** transcending, transgressing, transforming

Many of my colleagues argue that “everything” is interdisciplinary without recognizing that there are different kinds and different approaches and that when we are talking about interdisciplinarity, we are generally talking about that which crosses over these generalized disciplinary areas, not what happens with cross-pollination within these disciplinary areas. This is not a value judgement, just another way of breaking things down into categories in the hopes of better understanding the complexity.

In many ways everything is interdisciplinary because that is the nature of the complexity of life, and academia must mirror this complexity in order to stay relevant. However, academia continues to be divided in disciplinary ways that shape what is valued and what is funded. We often describe and celebrate the “narrow” interdisciplinarity that happens within established disciplines like the sciences (biochemistry) or the social sciences (social psychology) or humanities (literature in cultural context or storytelling in history), or across the sciences and social sciences (psychoneuroimmunology). These are natural extensions of the work done in these fields. Thus, conceptual and instrumental interdisciplinarity are valued for their productivity in advancing the larger enterprise of higher education and the production of knowledge as well as the advances of civilization. But this kind of interdisciplinary cross-over is only one way of understanding what interdisciplinary studies looks like.

The general education curriculum that provides the foundation for higher education is based on this same idea. As Repko and his co-authors explain, post World War II, “against the backdrop of the spread of communism and the growing power of the Soviet Union, proponents

intended the curriculum to provide a common core of knowledge, beliefs, and values centered on the ideals of freedom and democracy” (33-4). This common core was multidisciplinary in nature, even as it is seen as a part of the development of interdisciplinarity. Part of the idea was that general education would be “the place where all the parts would add up to a cohesive whole” (Hutcheson 1997 as quoted by Repko, et al. 33). But we cannot just assume that these parts, which are so divided by the structures of higher education, will simply “add up” to a cohesive whole. Interdisciplinary approaches take the multidisciplinary nature of general education and make it into an interdisciplinary enterprise—one which gives students the tools for integration and synthesis. But there might be good reasons why higher education would keep general education multi- rather than inter- disciplinary.

Earlier I mentioned the role of the Humanities in enterprises of American exceptionalism in the 1930s and the establishment of the interdisciplinary field of American studies with origins in both the 1930s as well as the 1960s, both times of great social upheaval and calls for social and cultural change. These dual origins have created a rift in the interdiscipline of American studies that speaks to the larger enterprise of interdisciplinarity. We might argue that this rift can be seen in the difference between instrumental and conceptual interdisciplinarity and critical and transdisciplinary versions of interdisciplinarity. Another way of thinking about this is the idea of an integrated educational experience that emphasizes “the importance of passing on the classical and secular ideals of Western culture through a common core of ‘great books’” (32) and the need to focus on “historically situated problems of society such as racism” and a balance between passing on the values of Western culture “with the need to critique its failings” (33). The latter might be categorized as an endeavor of critical interdisciplinarity.

As Repko and his co-authors argue, interdisciplinarity “gained momentum in the 1960s with the development of experimental colleges” and it achieved “legitimacy as a part of the liberal mainstream in the 1980s as honors, women’s studies, and environmental studies programs embraced it” (32). Interdisciplinarity was only inevitable and the “concept began after World War I with the quest for an integrated educational experience by influential education leaders” (32). They go on to outline the ways in which interdisciplinarity gained legitimacy in the academy through collaborative learning, multicultural education, writing across the curriculum, civic education, and service learning (37), for instance, and note that the French Philosopher,

Michel Foucault (whose work is firmly situated in the realm of transdisciplinarity according to Augsburg's definition), "argued in the 1960s that the disciplines are not just a way to produce knowledge; they are a sophisticated mechanism for regulating human conduct and social relations" (34). The ways in which these categories that delineate knowledge production in academia certainly shape the ways in which we see the world and the ways in which knowledge gets produced and reproduced.

Earlier I highlighted the two different definitions of transdisciplinarity. The first definition that Augsburg gives of transdisciplinarity fits this model of interdisciplinarity as a productive endeavor in the world of higher education: "problem-focused with an emphasis on joint problem solving at the science, technology, and society interface that goes beyond the confines of academia" (47). This practice of interdisciplinary pursuits is easily embraced for obvious reasons—we need problem-solving and collaboration and a transdisciplinary model makes problem-solving possible across disciplinary structures and between science and industry, for instance. This is the definition of transdisciplinarity that Repko and his co-authors present, dismissing the idea of transdisciplinarity as "the pursuit of a unified theory of everything" (75) as an outdated definition.

But what about that second definition by Augsburg? Transdisciplinarity "relies more on theories, concepts, and approaches that literally go beyond or transcend disciplines" and "knowledge that cannot be singularly claimed as belonging to or originating in any one discipline can be considered as transdisciplinary" (49). This kind of transdisciplinary interdisciplinarity might be seen as *critical* and Repko and his co-authors describe the goals of critical interdisciplinarians as seeking to "dismantle boundaries of all kinds" and to challenge "existing power structures, demanding that interdisciplinarity respond to the needs and problems of oppressed and marginalized groups" (citing Kann 1979, 77). They go on to juxtapose this kind of interdisciplinarity with instrumental interdisciplinarity, which they describe as "pragmatic" and seeking "commonalities," integration, and "comprehensive understandings" as well as "embracing the full diversity of authors and perspectives rather than rejecting their legitimacy" (78). While they admit that "some interdisciplinarians combine instrumental with critical approaches," it is clear from these arguments, as well as from the focus of the rest of the book,

that Repko and his co-authors see instrumental interdisciplinarity as legitimate and critical interdisciplinarity as suspect.

Because the example Augsburg gives of a transdisciplinary framework is Marxism, Repko's treatment of critical interdisciplinarity as suspect and transdisciplinarity as one-dimensional comes into focus. The other examples that Augsburg gives are general systems theory, structuralism, and phenomenology, all examples of critical theories that cross the humanities and social sciences. (49) Such theories are increasingly coming under attack as "anti-American" and Marxism is seen by some on the right—and some in the mainstream—as a function of communism and a threat rather than as a tool for understanding where we are, where we've been, and where we're going. Thus, it is no surprise that Repko and his coauthors would map critical disciplinarity along the lines of being "hostile" to ideas that they see as biased while "instrumental interdisciplinarians are aware" of disciplinary bias but "seek to create commonalities . . . integrate these, and construct more comprehensive understandings of complex problems" (78).

The point of what I have presented here—the tension between instrumental and critical conceptualizations of interdisciplinarity—is meant to illustrate that there are many different ways to 'do' interdisciplinary studies in academia and in the real world and that we need to be cautious about the ways in which politics infuse every aspect of academic discourse. Repko's assessment of critical interdisciplinarity is charged with negative language and assumptions that make it easy to dismiss critiques of disciplinary bias and other forms of bias that are present in every disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary endeavor. Augsburg gives a more measured assessment, considering the ways in which transdisciplinarity (or critical interdisciplinarity) goes "beyond the box" and "is a creative, self-reflective process of knowledge creation" (46). Instrumental interdisciplinarity assumes a kind of objectivity that critical interdisciplinarians would argue does not, and cannot, exist.

Augsburg quotes Montuori (2012) as describing transdisciplinarity as "emerg[ing] out of a felt need to go beyond some of the limitations of more traditional disciplinary academic approaches, and certain established ways of thinking" (47). She further argues that this kind of approach "goes beyond intrinsic motivation" and is "propelled by an individual's passion for learning" (47). This is my experience of interdisciplinary studies—as a student and as a

professor. We don't take on this marginalized and misunderstood field of study for any other reason than a passion to learn and to make a difference in the world. Every academic, researcher, writer, speaker, and human being can be biased, but critical/transdisciplinary interdisciplinarity calls for self-reflection, introspection, and critical thinking that show up differently than the process of instrumental interdisciplinarity which aims to, as Augsburg argues, get a job done by "solving an unsolved problem or achieving a greater understanding" (51) or conceptual interdisciplinarity, which is similar but emphasizes a "strong foundation in disciplinary knowledge" (51). While Repko sees the aims of critical interdisciplinarity to "transform existing structures of knowledge and education" (Klein 2005 as quoted by Augsburg 52) as suspect, Augsburg does not make the same value judgment. And this is the approach that I encourage for INT students regardless of what terms, categories, or approaches each student chooses. There is a whole universe of interdisciplinarity to be explored!

# What is Interdisciplinary Studies?



If you are an INT major you will be asked this question a lot. The answer might scare people. You might find resistance among family, friends, even among some of your professors. This book helps to prepare you to be able to answer this question. But, more importantly, this book gives you a foundation and tools for understanding what you study, how you study it, and why you study it.

Interdisciplinarity is a way of understanding that crosses categories, but it is also a field of study that uses a variety of tools and skills to do this work in an academic context. In short, interdisciplinarity crosses traditional disciplinary lines (like English, Biology, Music, Sociology...), working between and among them to apply multiple perspectives and develop new syntheses for a deeper understanding of a topic, issue, or problem.

Interdisciplinary programs, thus, combine disciplinary and interdisciplinary courses to create a course of study that is different from other degree programs. Some programs are well-established in a variety of institutions and are formed with a focal point like environmental studies or American culture or women.

And some students create a personal, individual program, which is what part of the work that INT majors do in INT 208 and throughout their education as their major/program evolves.

This is, of course, interdisciplinarity as defined as an academic pursuit. In the world outside of academia, interdisciplinarity is a pragmatic practice. In order to survive, let alone thrive, we need a variety of tools and knowledge and skills. We have to work together to keep the tide from rising—to shape the world in ways that will increase justice and peace.

The world of academia, of course, is connected to the world outside, which is the universe of interdisciplinarity in which we operate as students, teachers, and citizens of the world.

Interdisciplinarity is not simply a trend, but a phenomenon that is garnering “growing recognition that [interdisciplinarity] is needed to answer complex questions, solve complex problems, and gain coherent understanding of complex issues that are increasingly beyond the ability of any single discipline...” (Repko 3). As R.P. Clair notes, interdisciplinarity studies is especially important for new insights, creative and alternative solutions, and for social justice. Repko and his co-authors argue that the ““anything goes”” attitude of some faculty members discounts the “burgeoning literature that was clarifying the nature of interdisciplinarity and preparing it to enter the new millennium on a coherent and rigorous footing” (38). A lack of academic rigor is often a criticism of those who debase and devalue interdisciplinary studies, seeing it as a fluffy, touchy-feely, non-entity in the serious pursuits. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Ultimately, Repko’s dismissal of critical interdisciplinarity, as outlined in the previous section, is part and parcel with his desire to have interdisciplinary studies recognized as a legitimate field of study in the academy, alongside any other discipline or program. While interdisciplinarity happens in a variety of ways, it has been a well-established field in and of itself for decades. The [Association for Interdisciplinary Studies](#), for instance, is a non-profit educational association that “promotes the interchange of ideas among scholars and administrators in all of the arts and sciences on intellectual and organizational issues related to furthering integrative studies” and includes an annual conference as well as an international peer-reviewed publication, *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*.

As discussed in the previous section, while there are different and conflicting definitions, understandings, and practices of interdisciplinarity, at its base is the idea of thinking, researching, and writing between and among disciplines. How you, as an interdisciplinary



student, choose to navigate the possibilities of interdisciplinary studies depends upon your goals, ideals, and interests. Part of our work in INT 208 is establishing your academic voice and a thoughtful, critical understanding of your place in the world of academia. Students I INT 208 learn how to talk about what they do in ways that illustrate academic integrity as well as a depth of passion and dedication that appeals to future employers and collaborators. This is the work that we turn to after taking a closer look at what interdisciplinarity looks like at UMA.

Students/readers can find my short intro video on YouTube:

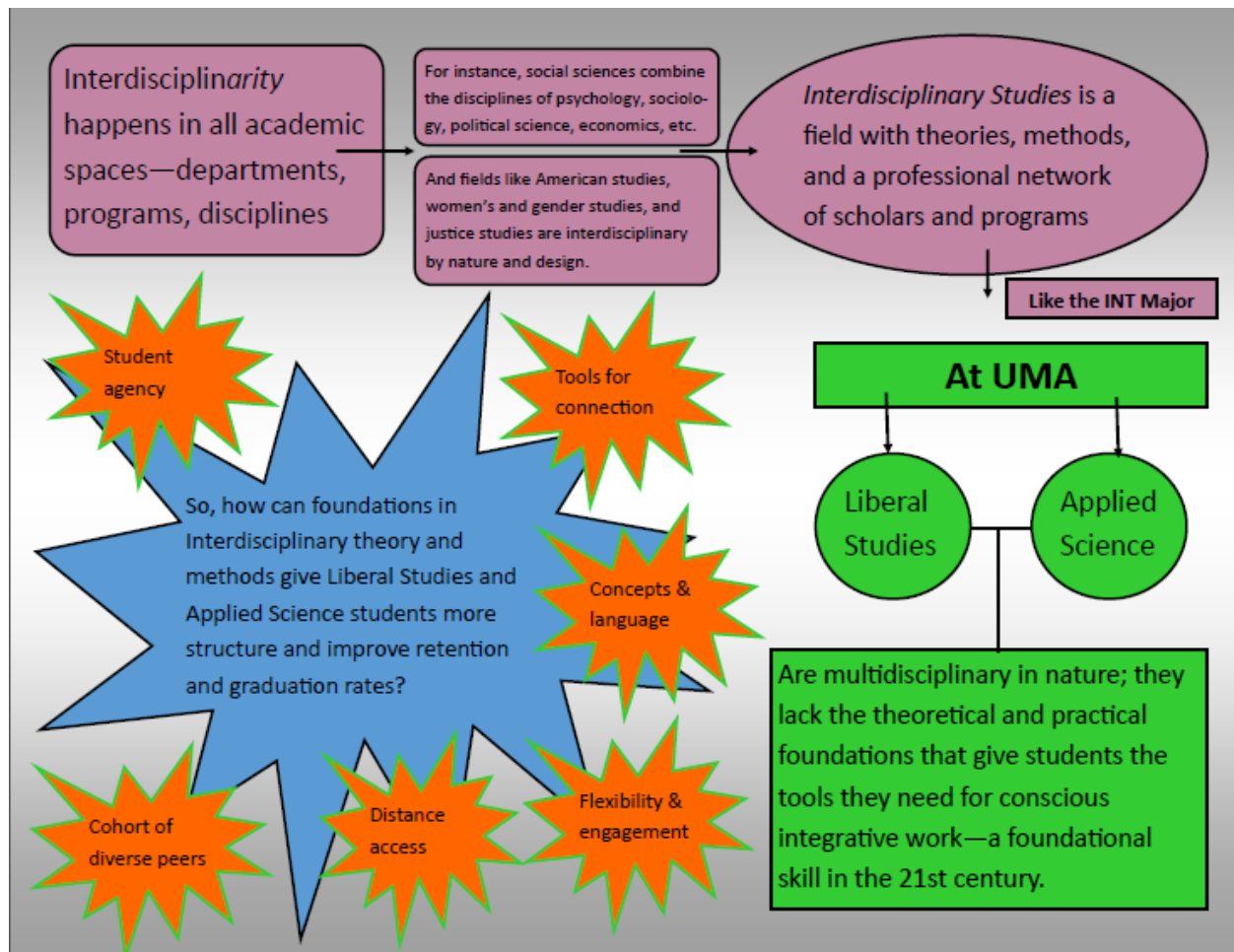
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSXyZepNqNo>

# Interdisciplinarity and INT at UMA

As we have previously considered, interdisciplinarity takes many different forms. We might consider the ways in which the general education curriculum at UMA provides opportunities for interdisciplinarity, even as it is multidisciplinary in its structure and practice. We might also consider how narrow and critical interdisciplinarity happens within majors/programs. And we might consider how majors like Business Administration, Education, and Mental Health and Human Services are multi- or inter- disciplinary. **What aspects of these programs make them *multi* and which make them *inter*?** We want to consider all of these dimensions, but the primary purpose of this section is to understand the multi- and inter-disciplinary majors of Interdisciplinary Studies (INT), Liberal Studies, and Applied Sciences. Questions for consideration re bolded throughout this section to help you reflect upon the information presented here and how it pertains to your course of study.

The following chart shows the relationship between interdisciplinarity as a concept and interdisciplinary studies as a field. It illustrates some of the differences between multidisciplinary programs and interdisciplinary programs.

**Consider the argument being made here about what an interdisciplinary major provides compared to a multidisciplinary major. How are these aspects specific to interdisciplinary work and how can they be enhanced in disciplinary or multidisciplinary majors? What other aspects can we consider as key to interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary studies?**



The following chart generalizes the similarities and differences between generalized programs like Liberal Studies, Discipline-specific majors, and an interdisciplinary studies major (INT). While this chart is specific to UMA's programs, it has wider applications.\*

**Where do you fall on this chart and what does that mean for you and your education?**

<b>INT MAJOR</b>	<b>LIBERAL STUDIES MAJOR</b>	<b>DISCIPLINARY MAJOR**</b>
Explores several disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary approaches and perspectives with a focus on finding connections.	Explores multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches and perspectives.	Explores a singular disciplinary perspective and approach.
A layered, <b>interconnected</b> knowledge.	A broad base of knowledge.	A specific and focused knowledge.
A <b>self-designed</b> program created in <b>collaboration</b> with faculty; students can name and shape their course of study.	A loose framework of curriculum that allows for flexibility and a generalized knowledge.	An established curriculum that meets the standards and expectations of a particular field or discipline.
Provides students with a <b>focused, directed knowledge</b> and a set of skills that can provide a particular career option or a general set of skills applicable to a variety of opportunities.	Provides students with a diverse set of knowledge and skills that provide a variety of possible job opportunities.	Provides students with a specialized knowledge and a defined set of career and job objectives.

For the sake of this book and this class (INT 208), we will assume that every student is an interdisciplinary student. The difference is whether you have chosen to follow a predetermined path or to forge your own. If you are following a predetermined path, there are still plenty of opportunities to do interdisciplinary work—within and beyond your major. If you are an Honors Program student, you are expected to seek out opportunities for deeper engagement, which often means applying interdisciplinary skills to the work that you do in your class, whether they are general education classes or classes for your major. **What makes you an interdisciplinary student?**

## The INT Major at UMA

The INT major at UMA is housed within the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and is a Bachelor of Arts degree. The Core Values of the College of Arts and Sciences are also core values of interdisciplinary studies generally, and INT at UMA specifically: “spirit of critical thinking and inquiry, learner-centered education, community engagement, creative interdisciplinary study, instruction that encompasses a rich mix of teaching modalities suited to students and subject matter, and a collegial environment that supports and encourages learning, scholarship, academic integrity, and creative activity.” **If your major falls within the CAS, how do you see these values reflected in your major/program of study? What are the core values of the College of Professional Studies? What is similar and different about these sets of core values?**

The INT major allows a student to work closely with faculty members to develop an individualized course of study that is:

**Connected:** INT students are encouraged to make connections between and among disciplines, between and among the classes they are taking, and between the classroom and their lives.

**Focused:** An INT major can be focused toward particular goals and interests like social justice, innovative technologies, or education, for instance.

**Flexible:** Working closely with faculty INT students decide what to take and when to take it.

**Student-centered:** A student proposes a set of courses that meet his or her interests and goals. The self-designed major creates a unique education for each student.

A capstone gives the INT major a framework for advanced studies interdisciplinary studies. Using this framework, students will choose a particular topic to explore in more depth, and will work with their advisors to create an independent study capstone (or seminar) that brings cohesion to their course of study.

*Program Goals and Student Learning Objectives:*

1. Identify, develop, apply, and synthesize the theories, methods, and critical perspectives of three disciplines or interdisciplines.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and the value of interdisciplinary inquiry.
3. Develop new interdisciplinary knowledge.
4. Develop, articulate, achieve, and analyze educational goals by employing interdisciplinary theory and methodology.
5. Effectively communicate interdisciplinary educational goals and knowledge to others.
6. Develop an awareness of diverse peoples, cultures, and ideas, and appreciate the importance of engaging in lifelong interdisciplinary learning to become informed and responsible global citizens.
7. Develop and apply critical reading, thinking, and writing skills.

*A former INT 208 student created this meme to explain interdisciplinary studies:*

**INT major starter pack**



Recent changes in the program have eliminated the “so much paperwork” part, though the paperwork is still more arduous than majors with established checksheets. **What do you think about the other elements highlighted here? Create your own INT meme to express your viewpoint about, and experience with INT, or interdisciplinarity more generally.**

*Some past self-designed INT majors include:*

Intersectional Culture, Care, and Advocacy;

Social Justice in Art, Culture and Community;

Critical Studies of Literature, Gender, Health, and Sexuality;

Information Technology;

Art Therapy;

Culture, Community, and Trauma;

Biology, French, and History;

Embodied Health, Language, and Culture;

Integrative Management;

German Language and Culture;

English, Art, and Business;

Culture and Stage;

Mental Health, Justice, and Advocacy;

Human Rights and Advocacy;

Mental Health, Language Arts, and Social Justice;

Educational Advocacy;

Health and Human Services & Language Arts;

The Science and Practice of Health & Sport;

Women, Gender, and Sexuality in American Culture;

Music, Business & Audio Science for Support in the Arts;

Psychology, Culture, and Education;

Critical Theory, Gender and Sexuality, and Media Studies;

American Culture, Gender, and Justice

**What do all of these programs have in common? (As far as you can tell from the names alone?) Can you imagine what disciplines, and what courses, may have been used to create each of these majors?**

\*This chart does not take into account interdisciplinary programs that are not self-designed. Generally, this criteria fits except instead of self-designed, these programs are created by interdisciplinary scholars who shape an interdisciplinary field within an institutional structure.

\*\*Disciplinary majors can include service-related fields like Nursing, Mental Health and Human Services, Education (teacher training), or Vet Tech, for instance. These programs prepare students according to standards set by national or state accreditation bodies. However, such programs may have interdisciplinary aspects by necessity. In any field where we work with people, interdisciplinary skills are a must.



# What Can I “do” with Interdisciplinary Studies?

This is a question that people ask of many majors, including Interdisciplinary Studies (INT) and Liberal Studies. People also tend to ask this question to English majors and other humanities and arts programs. They might ask this of social science majors or biology majors, but I assume the question is less common for business administration majors (though the path to employment is just as vague as an English major!) and mental health and human service majors, and non-existent for majors in education, dental assisting, vet tech, and nursing. Regardless, it is a question that devalues the process and purpose of education and bypasses the less tangible benefits, but also provides a necessary reality check. Very few can afford education for the sake of education—or, formal education for the sake of developing knowledge or gaining a piece of paper that provides more opportunity and access—but the value of education is far greater than the value of a diploma.

We might argue that many of the problems with education today can be directly linked to the rigid disciplinary organization and bureaucratic structures of education that we have discussed so far. Technology changes. Jobs change. Needs change. Identities change. Culture changes. Families change. The environment changes. Everything changes. Education tries to keep up. We might also argue that the general public is largely out of touch with what a college education is all about and that most people see education, generally, and college education, specifically as a means to an end. If it is anything more, it may be seen as an elitist enterprise or a waste of time. So, what can you do with any major, let alone an interdisciplinary major?

One thing you can do with an interdisciplinary education—whether you get an INT major or simply learn to value and communicate the interdisciplinary aspects of your degree—is prepare yourself with skills and knowledge that demonstrate flexibility, critical thinking and writing skills, and the ability to integrate ideas and address complex problems. Interdisciplinarity might also orient you toward an understanding of the bigger picture and the ability to make connections with ideas and people of diverse experiences.

As an interdisciplinary major you can “do” anything any other major can do, depending upon what your program includes. Teacher. Writer. Organizer. Manager. Artist. Scientist.

Therapist. Advocate. Law school, medical school, graduate school. Many of these, of course, require education beyond an undergraduate degree. As the world gets more complex, as more knowledge and data and texts are generated, there is more to learn just to function at a basic level in a field or profession. However, the more education a person has, generally, [the higher their quality of life](#). And this does not necessarily pertain to higher pay or better benefits. Higher education gives people the tools and resources to live better lives. None of this is easy. None of it is a given. Many more factors are involved. But imagine if education was seen as a basic human right, if everyone had equal access, if college was free?

What you do as an INT major is create a program that fits with where you are and where you want to go and, when relevant, where you've been. Doing this kind of work equips you to do so many other things.

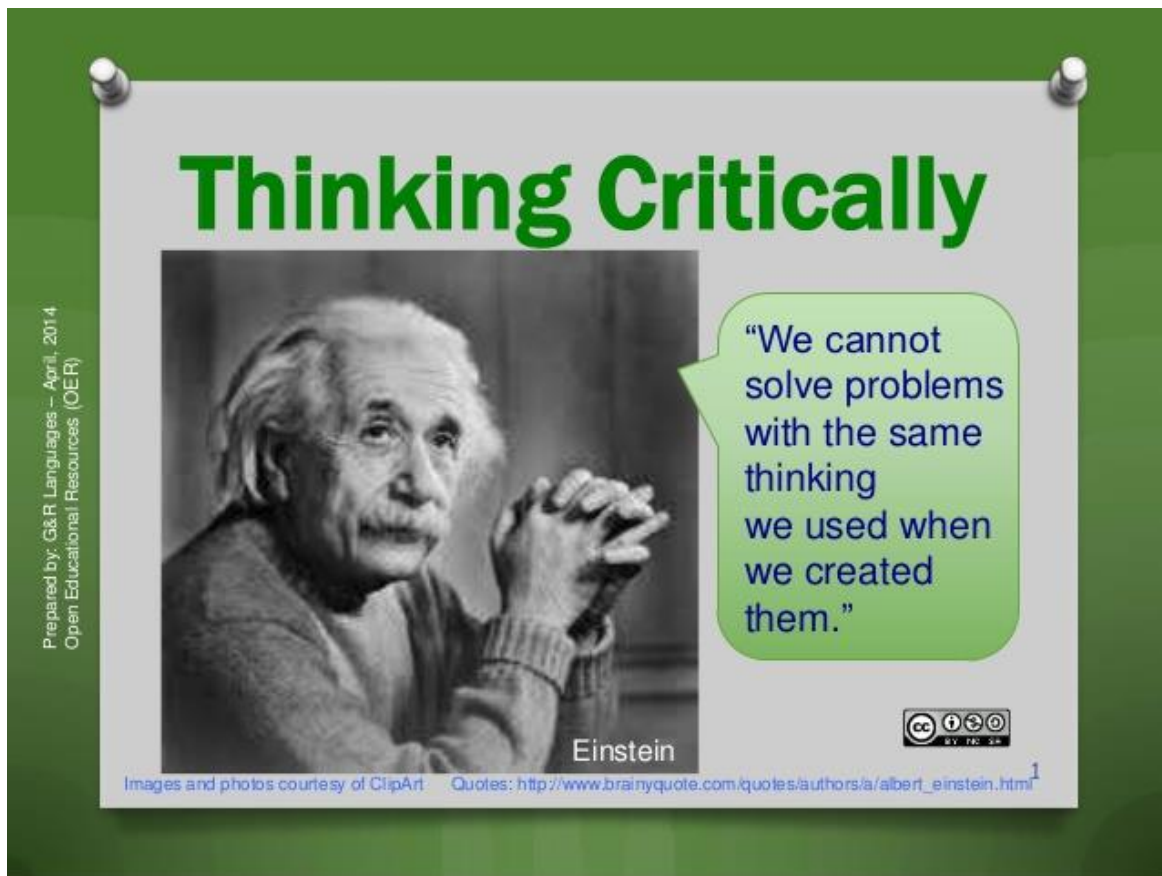
Regardless of what you “do,” interdisciplinarity is an asset in a changing universe.

## Part II: The Lay of the Interdisciplinary Land: Academia and Beyond

Part III provides some food for thought as it considers some of the bigger ideas that shape interdisciplinary ideas and programs. Some understanding of what differentiates disciplines helps us to see the interconnections that make interdisciplinarity so powerful.

The ideas here apply across, between, and among interdisciplinary studies, but they are also ideas that students/readers might meditate on through—and throughout—their studies. The relevance of interdisciplinarity to what we learn through academia, but also how we learn, is integral to life and to our communities.

# Critical Thinking



Critical Thinking is a key to a liberal arts education and it is a skill that students develop across all of their courses. In fact, general education courses are specifically designed to help students develop into the kind of well-rounded students/thinkers/citizens/people that we want to see as the movers and shakers of our world. However, while critical thinking is a skill that students need in all of their college courses, some classes and disciplinary approaches are more focused on critical thinking than others, and interdisciplinary studies is the ultimate articulation of critical thinking and so much more.

The meme above gets to the heart of why we need interdisciplinary studies. While Einstein is, perhaps, best known as a genius and a scientist, he was so much more than the stereotypical scientist. Einstein, a radical socialist [spent his life](#) in service to something bigger than himself. His legacy lives on today through the [Albert Einstein Institution](#) (and more).

TO BECOME A BETTER CRITICAL THINKER,  
ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

**ABOUT YOUR OWN BIASES**

*What do I think I know, and  
how do I know it's true?*

**ABOUT OTHERS' CLAIMS**

*What is the evidence supporting this claim?*

*How reliable is the evidence?*

*Does it come from a trusted source?*

*Is there an agenda behind it?*

*What are they not telling me?*

*Are there fallacies in the logic?*

*What is the other side of this issue?*

*Is there another side?*

This graphic should remind you of what you have already learned, especially in your college writing class; however, there are really no “should” and everyone’s ENG 101 experience is different, even in the same class with the same teacher.

We might add to the questions here, asking if there are multiple sides, not just an “other side.” We often get boxed into either/or thinking and this is yet another box that interdisciplinary studies asks us to step outside of. There are never only two sides to an issue. There is always multiplicity. Howard Zinn wrote about the either/or mentality of American ideology—that we are often given the “multiple choice” approach and told to choose A,B, or C and we are not even offered the D, E, or F choices. We can always see bigger and dig deeper. Interdisciplinary approaches help us to do this.

# Community, Reality, and Imagination

“The realities of our time, the difficult and sometimes ominous realities facing our communities, our nation, and our world are too real to deny. We ought not turn away from them, and higher education seems like a reasonable place to ground our efforts to contend with them. But part of learning to contend with the pressures of reality is finding freedom from reality, developing the imaginative space necessary for creative resistance to reality. ... just as too little reality can deplete the imagination, so can too much. A student who has not practiced resisting the pressure of reality, who has not been encouraged to work with impractical, abstract ideas in an Ivory Tower, is likely to be incapable of responding with genuine creativity and spontaneity to the problems and concerns of people around her. Such a person may be committed to serving the community, but she is likely to have difficulty generating truly innovative ideas, for the pressures of reality, convention, and popular bias will have come to weigh too heavily on her mind.”

—Matthew H. Bowker, “Defending the Ivory Tower: Toward Critical Community Engagement,” *Thought & Action*

In my Girls on Fire: Gender, Culture, and Justice in American Culture class I excerpted part of this quotation and asked students to think about how they are “developing the imaginative space necessary for creative resistance to reality” through their work on their final paper, and how YA dystopia provides this imaginative space. This kind of imagination is easy in dystopian contexts, but all interdisciplinary studies can use more room for imagination, more attention to “creative resistance to reality,” and more community connection and service.

There are so many important interdisciplinary ideas at work in the realm of community, reality, and imagination. “Creative resistance” is, perhaps, most obviously found in the Arts—music, dance, painting, drama, film, sculpture, and photography to name but a few. “Narrow” interdisciplinarity happens here in multi-media installations, YouTube videos, and street art. Artists challenge injustice, celebrate life, and provide opportunities for individual and collective contemplation and transformation. The Arts require development of skills as well as creativity and vision. We often assume that artists are a special class of people who have innate talents and

abilities, but we are all creative beings. The more we see creativity and imagination as a muscle we can develop and flex, the more we can develop “imaginative space” and new solutions.

Ultimately, “reality” is what we are studying and shaping. Being able to “[respond] with genuine creativity and spontaneity” is a key aspect of interdisciplinarity and to be able to do so in response “to the problems and concerns of people around [us]” makes an important connection between academia and “the ivory tower.” All ivory towers are academic structures but not all academic structures are ivory towers. The very term “Higher Education” is steeped in elitism—higher than what?

Many sources cite the growing divide in academia between elite institutions and state schools and community colleges. This growing divide mirrors the inequality of wealth distribution in our society that creates the 1% and the 99%. The resources and opportunities for students and graduates at elite institutions—as well as the professors (and some staff)—perpetuates this growing divide. While the rates of those with college educations are increasing, nearly 60% of Americans from age 25 to 64 have less than a two-year college degree.\* What is left unexamined and unearthed, what is incubated and propagated, when the elite are educated and the masses are left to their own devices (literally and figuratively!)?

Some argue that higher education is detached from the real world. It certainly *can* be. It is way too easy to lose touch with the realities that we don’t have to see, hear, taste, and smell—let alone live—every day. But interdisciplinary studies can bring us closer to reality because it is preparing us to take on the complex problems of reality: racial injustice, climate change, and polarized politics, to name but a few. High education gives us more tools, more context, and more power. It might also remind us that we are all in this together.

Education is a privilege; how we choose to use our education is important. An interdisciplinary education can be used toward transforming those “ominous realities.” In literature, and humanities more generally, imagination is a norm. But imagination works in important ways like empathy in social sciences and innovation in science and engineering. Interdisciplinary studies extends and transforms the ways in which our imaginations can serve our communities and positively impact our realities.



This creative aspect of a liberal arts education is frequently under fire. National conversations around job skills and the need for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) assume that education for the sake of education is a waste of our time—as individuals and as a society. In a conversation about our interdisciplinary colloquium theme, one of my colleagues, Lester French, (a math professor with an interdisciplinary science and engineering degree) wrote about his “pet peeve”: “the focus on learning skills [exclusively], rather than learning for the pure joy of learning.”\*\*

He continues: “If students don't explore these odd connections between disciplines, then they will be stuck in the same, old, tired way of thinking, rather than approaching a problem in a different and possibly unique way. A skill or trade is best taught in the field. The ability to learn, reason, and understand, in different ways creates opportunities for students to apply their talents in many more fields than what their major may indicate.”

This function of interdisciplinary education is so important to our communities and the realities that shape our lives. As adrienne maree brown argues in her book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, “a visionary exploration of humanity includes imagination,” which is “shaped by our entire life experience, our socialization, the concepts we are exposed to, where we fall in the global hierarchies of society” (17). In these ways, our imaginations are limited by reality as, she argues. “We are in an imagination battle” (18) and “it is our right and responsibility to create a new world” (19). Interdisciplinary studies helps us to create all kinds of new possibilities.

\*We might also note that the rise of for-profit education has contributed to this divide. In short, “diploma mills” bypass the traditional structures of liberal arts education in favor of skills and job training. They provide a faster track to employment and are geared toward working class folks.

\*\*This is a pet peeve I share, and one that I teach about through the work of bell hooks (*bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation*) and Mike Rose (*Back to School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education*), for instance.

# Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Interdisciplinarity

“The Humanities imagine, create, and interrogate....”

—Allen F. Repko, “Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory”

“While cultural studies scholars study many things, they share a commitment to interdisciplinarity, contextualization, and social and political engagement.”

—Master’s in English, Cultural Studies Track Program Description, Kansas State University

“And, over the course of the twentieth century, [Humanities] took on new meanings as disciplinary practices changed, new interdisciplinary fields arose, and the boundaries of humanities and social sciences were crossed” (2).

—Julie Thompson Klein, *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy*

The relationships and entanglements of these three categories—Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Interdisciplinarity—make academic ground richer, with endless opportunities for teaching and scholarship. The complexity of one, let alone all three, also adds to confusion and uncertainty; however, the complexity reflects the world we live in. Students whose understanding and inquiry cross traditional disciplinary boundaries are more equipped to live and work in our increasingly complicated world.

Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Interdisciplinarity offer ways of teaching and learning that connect knowledge and experience, theory and practice, student and teacher, individual and community. If we try to separate the strands of Humanities, Cultural Studies, and Interdisciplinarity, we find that some of the pieces are always together, and that new strands form before they can be untangled.

Humanities is many different things at once and brings together similar fields like Literature (English), History, Philosophy, Art, Languages, and Music.\* “The Humanities” have a specific history, rooted in the works of ancient cultures, and an evolving canon of texts that recognizes the historical and contemporary, traditional and innovative.

While Humanities is often a buzzword and concept used to preserve traditional ideas, Cultural Studies questions tradition and argues for the importance of all voices, all texts, especially those of the oppressed and marginalized. The qualities that unite Humanities—in method and subject—make interdisciplinary movement among them more fluid; they are textual and open for interpretation. Cultural Studies integrates social sciences (like economics, sociology, political science, and psychology) and, thus, crosses disciplinary lines more than the “narrow” interdisciplinarity among the Humanities, for instance the cultural and historical context brought to literature via history or philosophy that elucidates events from history.

Cultural Studies is both wider and narrower than Humanities. Cultural studies is a shared commitment to critical analysis and political engagement. It is practiced within disciplinary boundaries and between and among them. As Klein describes, “Cultural studies is a general form of the bottom-up model” (59). Cultural studies takes the Humanities outside of their narrow box—it expands and explodes the object to “culture” and “texts” of all kinds. It pushes Humanities to engage us personally and politically. Cultural studies is “critical humanities.”

“The newer interdisciplinary ‘critical humanities,’” Repko argues, quoting Davidson and Goldberg, “‘focuses not so much on human culture itself as on our *knowledge of it, and on disciplinary knowledge in general*’” (72; Repko’s italics). Cultural Studies challenges what we know and how we know it.

Those who practice Cultural Studies are mocked by dissenters as: people who “wrongly assume they can change the social order through revised canons of content and interpretation” (Miller citing Rorty 1994). But the belief in the formative and transformative power and potential of culture is well-rooted in, and across, disciplines such as English, History, Sociology, Psychology and interdisciplinary fields such as Black Studies, American Studies, and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Miller describes Cultural Studies as a “tendency across disciplines rather than a discipline itself” (108). (This is multidisciplinary if across, and interdisciplinary if integrative.) As Miller explains,

Cultural studies must be animated by subjectivity and power—how human subjects are formed and experience cultural and social space. It takes its agenda and mode of analysis from economics, politics, media and communication studies, sociology, literature, education, the law, science and technology studies, environmentalism, anthropology, and history. The focus is gender, race, class, and sexuality in everyday life, under the sign of a commitment to progressive social change. (108)

Cultural Studies, thus, combines a variety of interdisciplinary “modes of analysis” that expand English and Humanities, consciously intersects with gender, race, class, and sexuality, and politicizes the work of research, teaching, and learning. What distinguishes Cultural Studies from other fields is self-consciousness, positioning, and transparency. But Cultural Studies lends itself to all kinds of interdisciplinary connections.

\*Art and music can be “fine arts” when they focus on developing skills for the creation and production of texts and objects. They can be humanities when focused on historical trends or criticism. Language is often a separate department of foreign language or a specific language or might be housed in another department. English departments usually include literature as well as studies of rhetoric and creative writing. Creative writing (fiction, poetry, drama) is a “fine art” as well as an object of study. (Confused yet?)

# A Case for Social Justice

“We are no longer naïve concerning the arena in which social problems exist—they exist entangled with every aspect of society.... Interdisciplinary studies may provide the means to finding creative and alternative solutions to contemporary world problems, especially where social-political issues are entangled in the material remedies. This can only be achieved if a dialog of social justice engages both the physical sciences and the liberal arts. ... These overlapping worlds have been treated as distinct for far too long. Bringing seemingly disparate fields together through novel approaches may give new insights into the entangled worlds in which we live, giving social justice a chance to surface and spread” (xxi).

—R.P. Clair, *Zombie Seed and the Butterfly Blues: A Case for Social Justice*

The interdisciplinary cultural studies infiltration into humanities (literature, art, music, etc.) illuminates the importance of social justice. While not all interdisciplinary programs or models incorporate ideas of social justice, this concept is tightly tied to some ideas and origins of interdisciplinarity. The need for solutions to complex and increasingly critical human problems has driven interdisciplinary endeavors, especially in the social sciences and sciences. Racial injustice, climate change, and political polarization, for instance, constantly remind us that we need “creative and alternative solutions.”

Interdisciplinarity works to make ideas relevant to our social world. Social science provides a variety of disciplinary perspectives that can be helpful toward considerations of social justice and foundational to interdisciplinary studies. Sociology, psychology, political science, and economics often cross within the social sciences, and also apply outside of these related disciplines. Studying human patterns, systems, and structures gives us a foundation for creating new institutions, policies, and practices.

Social justice is also key to the continued relevance of interdisciplinary studies and its growth in the future. R.P. Clair makes these points in her introduction and then goes on to explore interdisciplinarity and social justice in a narrative form—a story/a novel/a piece of fiction. Narratives (or stories, or texts) come in many forms like art, music, film, and movement.

The Humanities and the Arts are where we can get a better grasp on the meaning of life and explore possibilities. Shoshona Currier argues that “the value of the artists goes beyond the shows they create. . . Artists change space” and, further, the arts are “where our agency lies.” Currier speaks to “this changed world we’re all navigating” and highlights what the arts have contributed to our understanding of Covid and the world that is now change by Covid. Science can only tell us so much about the world and, more and more, people have a distrust of science and might actually believe the fictions that portray science more than the science itself.

As Anderson and Blayer, argue, “Narratives breathe life into culture even as they draw sustenance from it, a flexible, frequently contested relationship” (3). Likewise, the power of fiction and the arts is central to a variety of interdisciplinary studies, particularly in critical humanities areas like cultural studies. But science can be more difficult to integrate. The deeper we go into studies of science, the more specialization is required. And the more we have specialization, the greater the need for collaborative interdisciplinary projects.

Not only do students and professors in the Humanities tend to fear and avoid math and science, the approaches and worldviews in the sciences are often opposite from those in the Humanities. But R.P. Clair argues, “Science is meant to touch and improve our lives, not alienate us from ourselves. Social problems cannot be so easily segregated these days” (xx). Further, science and social science often proclaim an objectivity that does not exist. Science and social science have produced ideas like the Bell Curve or the Super-predator, reinforcing false ideas of white racial superiority and Black racial inferiority. Ideas are measured and tested and the biases of the researcher shape every step of the process. Cultural studies challenges assumptions of objectivity; interdisciplinarity provides tools for deeper, more critical, more contextual understandings as disciplinary knowledge evolves. By necessity, social justice is an interdisciplinary enterprise.

When Humanities, Social Science, and science integrate (and when they partner with professional studies and an idea of service), social justice is closer than we might (fail to) imagine. And through the Arts, we imagine a better future, what adrienne maree brown refers to as “science-fictional behavior”—being concerned with the way our actions and beliefs now, today, will shape the future, tomorrow, the next generation” (16). But, we must remain critically vigilant and self-reflective, both necessary aspects of interdisciplinarity.

# Where We Meet Science

“Interdisciplinary team science has emerged as the defining feature of the scientific endeavor in the twenty-first century. Moving beyond the lip service and fashion, scholars, scientists, practitioners, and funders recognize that scientists working largely alone in their labs and within a unidisciplinary framework are no longer best equipped to address the complex problems facing global society, whether they arise from climate change, social change, or challenges to human health” (ix).

—Frank Kessel, Patricia L. Rosenfield, Norman B. Anderson, eds.

*Interdisciplinary Research: Case Studies from Health and Social Science*

Interdisciplinarity is ripe within the sciences. The “narrow” interdisciplinarity found in the sciences produces biochemistry and neuroscience, among many other combinations. With the growing complexity of our understanding of, for instance, the insanely complex human body, collaboration between the sciences makes sense.

Many of the interdisciplinary endeavors in the sciences are collaborative, assembling a team of researchers to address a particular problem or subject, like specific or general health concerns or environmental issues. As Kessel, et al. argue, “a range of new interdisciplinary fields has formed in recent decades” and “interfaces among biological, behavioral, social, and health sciences have been perhaps the most fertile ground” for “a disproportionate number of major scientific discoveries and innovations [that] involve crossing boundaries of established disciplines” (xxi). Scientists cross disciplines because they have to.

Scientists also collaborate with social scientists, bringing a more human connection to the insights of science. Social science can provide insights into scientific studies that are social and cultural. Social science can also bridge the gap between science and people.

As John W. Rowe argues in the introduction to *Interdisciplinary Research*, interdisciplinarity is “vital for the well-being of science *and* society... whether in the form of scientific research and scholarly inquiry or interventions and policy aimed at improving

individual health and social well-being” (446). Individual health as well as the well-being of society are more complex than science can measure and evaluate.

Social science is one bridge, but other approaches and forms—like those in the Humanities—can make interdisciplinary inquiry even richer and more connected to communities and individuals’ lives. Humanities give life texture and meaning, texts toward self-discovery and cross-cultural connections, and a factor that is difficult to measure and often dismissed—happiness.

Scientific language, relationships, and advances can be difficult for non-scientists to fully understand or accept; this makes collaboration between science and the humanities a challenge. As Craig Calhoun and Cora Marrett explain in their foreward, “Successful collaboration is not simply a matter of appropriation but requires mutual transformation. This is the difference between simply transporting a technique from one field to another, or citing research across disciplinary boundaries, and actually forging integrative interdisciplinary research projects” (xxii). “Integrative interdisciplinary research projects” take work and communication and the structure of academic institutions too rarely make room for such endeavors.

Such integrative work is difficult in fields where techniques, language, and process can be very different. As Aletha C. Huston notes in “A Path to Interdisciplinary Scholarship”: “truly interdisciplinary scholarship requires participants to learn how to think in the lexicon of other disciplines, at least to some degree” (266).<sup>\*</sup> As a result, in many interdisciplinary endeavors, sciences are often segregated from the Humanities.

This segregation ignores the important connections between science and the humanities and limits interdisciplinary understanding. One connection is stories. As Anderson and Blayer argue, “Stories are sticky. They adhere to many surfaces, such as when you cannot get one out of your head but more fundamentally they bond all manner of things” (1). Stories, as R.P. Clair argues and illustrates, also link to social justice. Adhesion, integration, application, transformation—stories are bigger than just words on a page (or a screen).

The body is another connection. In our culture (and beyond), the body is an inconvenience. The mind, the intellect, is where we do the important intellectual work (even more true for academia). We are expected to ignore the inconveniences of the body—its need for



sleep, nourishment, care, and touch. If something goes wrong with the body, we are blamed for our lack of responsibility. The nascent field of Embodied Social Justice challenges this dualism and illustrates the importance of paying attention to the body. Neuroscience, Somatics, communications (non-verbal), critical theory, and more come together as an integrated set of lenses that remind us that our bodies are common ground and that if we can't understand what's happening inside our own bodies we won't be able to understand what's happening outside our selves.\*\*

Interdisciplinary students, professors, and researchers have a responsibility to reach across the divide between the sciences and the humanities. How we do that is the challenge. But, what better than interdisciplinarity to address the issue?

\* Carolyn Haynes argues, in *Innovations in Interdisciplinary Teaching*, that "The task of the interdisciplinary investigator, then, is to invent a new discourse that critically combines key elements of several disciplinary discourses and that is in keeping with his or her own sense of self" (xv). The interdisciplinary investigator shapes language and integration.

\*\*Rae Johnson's book *Embodied Social Justice* (Routledge) is one starting point for the study of Embodied Social Justice in academia. The Embody Lab is an online hub for scholars, practitioners, and students.

# Diversity, Feminism, and Critical Consciousness

“But the hushing of criticism of honest opponents is a dangerous thing. It leads some of the best of the critics to unfortunate silence and paralysis of effort, and others to burst into speech so passionately and intemperately as to lose listeners. Honest and earnest criticism from those whose interests are most nearly touched, —criticism of writers by readers, of government by those governed, of leaders by those led, —this is the soul of democracy and the safeguard of modern society” (462).

—W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

“Feminist teachers demonstrate sincere concern for their students as people and as learners and communicate this care through treating students as individuals, helping students make connections between their studies and their personal lives, and guiding students through the process of personal growth that accompanies their intellectual development.”

—*Feminist Pedagogy*, 5

Diversity is a kind of buzz word that academic institutions use in a variety of ways. Calls for diversity are often only skin deep (literally, since race is a social construct that we can see in skin color and hair texture) and superficial. They rarely get to the roots of the problems of white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy and other structures that place us into hierarchies based upon race, class, and gender and create oppressive and unjust conditions.

Educational institutions are often bastions of whiteness and privilege. They are also spaces where people of all kinds come together and sometimes change happens. The progression from white male dominated curriculum and spaces to spaces of inclusion and equity is a long-haul project. Some educational institutions have finally begun to take diversity more seriously because they can no longer afford to avoid addressing the lack of diversity that has plagued educational institutions (and American institutions of all kinds).

The sameness that can propagate in traditional disciplinary spaces (along with traditional educational institutions and curricula) leads to the “hushing of criticism” while the kind of criticism that DuBois advocates speak to one of the important dimensions of interdisciplinarity. To be adept critics we need to be flexible learners; we need to have a sense of the bigger picture as well as the defining details. We must question the blind spots and shortcomings of each discipline as well as education as an enterprise shaped by what bell hooks calls white supremacist capitalist (imperialist) patriarchy.

A university education exposes us to people and ideas that we might not otherwise come into contact with in our segregated and separated society. But simply being in the presence of physical, cultural, or ideological difference does not create “diversity.” For instance, while still dominated by white, heterosexual, men, popular culture provides a diversity of people in shows, commercials, online spaces, and more. But this increasingly diverse representation does not change the structures of white supremacy that create inequalities in health or over-representation of BIPOC in prisons and the U.S. military.\* Critical consciousness asks us to dig deeper than superficial representations.

The critical interdisciplinary field of Women’s Studies (which is evolving into women, gender, and sexuality studies and other names) emerged from the women’s rights movement (influenced by the Civil Rights movement) of the late 1960s and 70s. From its inception, WGS acted as a corrective to curriculum dominated by the thoughts, actions, ideas, books, and teaching of white men as the center of education, if not the center of the known universe. This field continues to grow and brings feminist theory and practice (praxis) into disciplinary and interdisciplinary spaces as well as spaces beyond the academy. With that growth, there comes backlash—in the academy and in American culture where the complex ideas that we debate and develop are watered down, misrepresented, and misunderstood.

All of this is, of course, more complicated than I can capture in a few short paragraphs.

In short: diversity + critical thinking = critical consciousness. Critical consciousness recognizes the importance of intersectional analysis—a consideration of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the context of identity and capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Critical consciousness helps us to make sense of the individual and the

structural, the personal and the institutional. A similar concept of being “woke” has emerged in social media spaces in the last few years.

Different kinds of critical consciousness include: double consciousness, feminist consciousness, oppositional consciousness, differential consciousness.\*\*

With conscious application of theories of difference, and the integration of interdisciplinarity and social justice, critical consciousness gives students an important tool: the ability to see beyond the surface of things (and the desire to work toward changing the veneer and the substance beneath). “Honest and earnest criticism” is a tool of diversity and critical thinking.

Students who are more aware of difference, equity, power, culture, and systems and structures are assets—as workers, citizens, parents, community members—in an increasingly diverse and global world.

Interdisciplinary studies asks students to engage with this increasingly complex world in all its dimensions and the approaches found in feminist pedagogy (as quoted above) are often found in other kinds of interdisciplinary spaces as well.

\*If you are not familiar with the acronym, BIPOC = Black, Indigenous, People of Color—a helpful and problematic term to use when discussing diversity and other issues.

\*\*These are complex ideas that are defined, debated, and disseminated by interdisciplinary scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois, Chela Sandoval, and bell hooks. These theories cross the humanities and social sciences, cultural studies and area studies. See the Resources section at the end of this book for further reading.

## Part III: Self-Discovery

The questions addressed in the last section: Am I an Interdisciplinary Student? and What Can I “Do” with Interdisciplinary Studies? Both largely depend upon who you are as an individual and what you are interested in personally, academically, and professionally. This section will help you to explore who you are and what you are interested in and will, thus, help you determine what kind of interdisciplinary studies student you are and what you want to study.

# Who Am I?



There are many ways to answer this question. And while there are some qualities that are consistent, we are always changing, adapting, evolving, and growing and one of the beautiful things about being human is that we can always change our mind. Literally and figuratively.

In the quest to know ourselves better, a number of tools are at our disposal. These tools are lenses through which to consider ourselves and the world around us, but it is important to remember that these are all tools. One tool is psychology and, specifically, personality tests. For many years I thought that psychology was bullshit. Sociology appealed to me and made sense to me and that's what I focused on in college. Like the typical ignorant know-it-all, I skipped past intro to psychology and went into personality theory, but I did not take it seriously. Now I find psychology to be fascinating as one of the tools in my toolbox, even though I still tend toward theories of social construction in most cases.

There are the most well-known personality tests like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (check out [16Personalities](#)) and the [Big Five Personality Test](#), as well as a variety of IQ tests and tests that are indicative of a person's strengths and abilities. There are also [EQ tests](#) (a longer one [from Psychology Today](#)) that measure emotional intelligence. You can even find out your spirit animal or you can choose your favorite colors to reveal your inner workings. There are tons of these kinds of tests (and many are not necessarily informed by the rigors of social science). It can be easy to get lost in these quizzes (I just got lost in the [Visual DNA test](#)).

For fun, and character insights (pun intended), there are also a variety of tests that measure [which Hogwarts house you belong to](#) (via the Sorting Hat—that's a Harry Potter thing,

if you didn't know) or which faction you would belong to in the book/movies series, Divergent. A variety of qualities, values, and traits accompany each of these categories. Ultimately all of these are simply tools that we can use to better understand ourselves while also recognizing that we are complex beings in a complex world and we are always changing and evolving.

**Take one of more personality tests and reflect upon what these tests taught you about yourself. What did they reconfirm for you? Did you learn anything new about yourself or develop more clarity about yourself or your interests? Did anything surprise you?**

# What Skills and Qualities Do I Embody?

The more awareness that we develop—about our personality, our attitude toward work, and about our strengths and weaknesses—the more clarity we will have when it comes to building the career we want to have and the life we want to live. One thing we want to consider more closely is what kinds of skills and qualities we embody and what kinds of skills and qualities we would like to further develop. INT students tend to share some skills and qualities like a love of learning, an ability to tolerate (and even embrace!) ambiguity, a desire to make the world a better place for all people (and maybe even plants, animals, and the planet!).

Repko and his co-authors describe the “intellectual capacities” that are part of the “Interdisciplinary Studies ‘Cognitive Toolkit’”:

**Perspective-taking:** “the intellectual capacity to view a problem or subject or artifact from alternative viewpoints . . . in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of it” (92)

**Critical thinking:** “the capacity to analyze, critique, and assess” (93).

**Intellectual dexterity:** “the ability to speak to (if not from) a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience” (94).

They also outline values that are important “guiding principles” to interdisciplinary work:

Empathy

Ethical consciousness

Humility

Appreciation of diversity

Tolerance of ambiguity

Civic engagement



Augsburg adds to these:

Reliability

Flexibility

Resilience

Risk-taking

Having a thick skin

And Repko and his co-authors explain pertinent personality traits:

Entrepreneurship

Love of learning

Self-reflection

Intellectual courage

Independence of judgment

Patience

Enjoying a challenge

Open-mindedness

And skills or competencies:

Communicative competence

Abstract thinking

Creative thinking

Metacognition: “awareness of your own learning process” or “thinking about your thinking”

Augsburg adds the following skills to this list:

Problem solving skills

Systems thinking

Knowing how to learn and knowing where to look for information

Differentiating, comparing, contrasting, relating, clarifying, reconciling

Synthesizing, reframing, redefinition, organization, evaluation, translation

Teamwork, listening, ability to suspend judgment, leadership, ability to be a team player

All of these add up to empowering students to:

- “Think and act effectively on complex problems without getting overwhelmed or cowed by disciplinary experts or resorting to digging in your heels” (104)
- “address real-world complexity in ways that others are unable to” (104)
- “effectively apply your education to new contexts, new problems, and new responsibilities” (104)

**Consider these lists. If there are any terms that you are unfamiliar with, look them up and make notes about what they mean. Which of these skills, qualities, and competencies came up on the personality tests that you took? Which skills, qualities, and competencies do you feel describe you? Why/ How? (Use specific examples) Which of these skills, qualities, and competencies do you think you need to work to develop? How might you develop them?**

# What Do I Like to Do?

Sometimes the things that we like to do in our “free” time are things that we can’t do in our working time. Or at least we sometimes think that the things we like to do can’t possibly be things that we might do to *earn a living*. But why not? Oftentimes the things that we are good at are the same things that we enjoy doing and vice versa. This might not necessarily be the case, or we might not be able to do the things we enjoy on a level to do so professionally (like dance or play sports, for instance). But, regardless, it is worth exploring the things that we like doing to get a fuller picture of what we might dedicate our working lives to. After all, Americans spend a lot of time at work!

Consider the following questions adapted from Augsburg, chapter 8 (write out your answers and/or make lists to reflect back upon):

- What are your interests? Or what topics or activities are you interested in learning more about? (consider the list from the pdf from Augsburg)
- What do you enjoy doing when you are not in school or working?
- Do you have a hobby?
- What recreational activities do you participate in?
- What do you most enjoy doing on a regular basis? How do you feel when you do this? How do you feel when you don’t do this?
- What do you read when you are not reading an assignment for school? What do you read that you don’t read on your phone!
- What kind of music do you enjoy listening to? Or do you prefer to listen to audio books or podcasts?
- What podcasts do you listen to or what topics do you enjoy discussing with family and friends?
- What TV shows do you watch regularly, or what are your favorite TV shows?
- What are some of your favorite movies? What makes these your favorites?
- What websites do you visit most often or what apps do you use most frequently?

Reflect your lists and your answers to the questions above. Are there patterns you find? Can you organize or categorize your interests? If so, what trends do you recognize? If not, why don't these things connect to each other? Are there common threads among your interests? Are there connections that you may not be seeing without further reflection?

# What Do I like to Study?

Perhaps you already know exactly what you want to study, or at least have some general categories of interest. Many INT students want to study almost everything, so it does help to narrow things down a bit and explore what you are truly passionate about studying. Whether you have a strong sense of what you are interested in and what you want to study, or not, it is helpful to explore your prior learning experiences.

Toward this exploration, answer the following questions. Write out your answers and/or make lists to reflect upon.

- Consider your earliest memories of school, perhaps elementary school. What were your favorite subjects? Do you remember any specific teachers or texts or activities? What stands out to you as memorable from this part of your educational journey?
- Consider your education in seventh or eighth grade. What were your favorite subjects? Do you remember any specific teachers or texts or activities? What stands out to you as memorable from this part of your educational journey?
- Consider your high school education. What were your favorite subjects? Do you remember any specific teachers or texts or activities? What stands out to you as memorable from this part of your educational journey?
- Consider your college education so far. What are your favorite classes? Which teachers or texts or activities stand out to you as your most enjoyable college experiences so far? What is most memorable from this part of your educational journey? What do you think you will remember most fondly ten years from now?

**Reflect upon your answers to the questions above. Do your past favorites match up with your favorite topics and subjects today? Did these questions help you remember any details that you may have forgotten or to see any of your memories in a new light? What aspects from your pre-college education do you wish were part of your college education? What would your college education look like, and how would it be different, if some of your past favorites were a more central part?**

**Now that we've interrogated the past, let's imagine the future!**

- If you could do anything and it paid the bills and met your survival needs, what would you do? Why? What would you be? Why?
- What would you *like to do*, or what can you see yourself doing, after graduation?
- Is there an expected and/or desired trajectory for your future based upon your field of study? If so, describe and explain this trajectory. Does this vision mesh with your vision/desires? If there is not an obvious trajectory, what is your imagined trajectory? Does this match your vision/desire?

**And, now that we have considered the past and the future, let's consider the present.**

- What are you doing now to try to meet your future goals/dreams/visions? What else could you do (and what do you need to do it)?
- What are you learning in your current classes and major/program? What do you *need* to learn? What else do you *want* to learn?

# What Do I Want to Be When I Grow Up?

Some of us who have well-established careers might still have trouble answering this awful question. It is the real-life version of that other awful question that people ask you when they find out what your major is: what do you plan to do with that? Or, what can you do with that?

When I was growing up I was fixed on finding an answer to this question. I thought that it would give me goals, purpose, direction. Or, rather, I thought that figuring out what I wanted to “do” was a golden ticket to adulthood, and I certainly wanted this ticket because I thought that I was already grown! I wanted to be a writer, but that didn’t seem like a real thing to be. I didn’t know anyone who was a writer, except for my mom and she always wanted to be a “real” writer. I was constantly searching for something that would define me and my mom would encourage me with suggestions: you’re so good at \_\_\_\_; you know, you could be a \_\_\_\_\_. I would run with the idea for a moment and then feel just as lost again.

Nothing ever felt like the right fit and I never would have thought that I would be a college professor. Until I got to college I had never really imagined that such a thing existed, let alone that I could be that thing. When I was applying for college scholarships I would change my answer almost every time, trying to fit what I perceived was the right answer. I almost always missed the mark. For instance, for a historical society type of scholarship I answered that I wanted to be a writer. They asked what I wanted to write and I said historical fiction. I read a lot, but I never really read historical fiction, and I had certainly never considered writing any. But what is the right answer to this question? Is there ever a right answer?

In our society, we are so defined by what we “do” for a living. We are judged and measured by this question, and if our answer is inadequate, then we are judged to also be inadequate. I have witnessed my husband struggle with this question throughout his adult life. People who work with me assume that my husband must be equally accomplished and ambitious. (I hate the connotation of this word *ambitious*, but let’s go with it.) When he has answered “I deliver furniture.” Or, “I am a tow truck driver.” I have watched people’s eyes glaze over. I’ve seen them stutter and become stumped with a follow up question. I watched them turn

away and talk to someone else. He finally stopped putting himself in social situations so he could avoid answering that question and years later, after being unemployed, started answering that he was retired. The question that followed was often: what did you do before you retired? Sigh. Class divisions are not just about money; they are also about fitting in with expectations of what we do, how we talk, what we eat, where we live, what we do in our spare time, what we buy with the money that we have. And all of this revolves so much around what we do for a living.

I have a hard time answering this question as well. In some social and family situations, it sounds snooty to say I am a professor, even though that is the truth. Once, when I was with my not-so-educated side of the family I answered that I was a teacher. No one asked me any follow-up questions and later my mom said how proud of me she was for how humble I am. If I ever really answered the question honestly, the list of what I do would be so long that the person who asked the question would certainly be sorry they ever asked it in the first place. Some people are impressed by the college professor answer; some people are intimidated by it. Some people are disgusted by it—I must be an overpaid, elitist, out of touch egomaniac who gets the summers off and hasn't worked an honest day in my life. Then again, I am a woman so I must not actually be a college professor at all.

When I taught in Denmark for a year, I had a ridiculously fancy-sounding title—The Danish Distinguished Professor of American Studies at the Center for American Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. To top it off, I was a Fulbright. Both of these things sounds super-impressive on an American resume. But the thing is, in Denmark this title was embarrassing. They have a thing called [Law of Jante](#)—in short, a person should not talk about their accomplishments or boast about themselves because they should be more concerned with the well-being of the larger society. But a person does not even need to brag to be seen as violating the Law of Jante. Simply talking about what you do, especially if it sounds impressive is enough to be seen in a negative light by other people. So, I often simply said that I was a visiting professor. This alone challenged people's perceptions since usually the Fulbright visiting professor was a man. More than once, my husband was asked the question and he had to say that he was just along for the ride.



So, perhaps when we think about what we want to be when we grow up, we think more about the kind of person we want to be, the kind of life we want to live, the way we want to spend our time, what we want to spend our money on, the kind of people we want to spend our time with, and the kind of world we want to contribute to. And, maybe we stop asking people that question....

Perhaps we choose to take the WOWI, or another kind of career assessment, for insights into what kind of profession we would be suited for and some of the skills needed for this line of work.

# What Is My Relationship to Work?

Growing up, my parents had different philosophies about work. My dad, an engineer—a literal “rocket scientist”—had a 9 to 5 job. Work was something he did to pay the bills. When the work day ended, his work responsibilities ended. Work was a means to an end—supporting his family. He grew up on a dairy farm in Pennsylvania and he was the odd child who preferred to read a book. He did well in school and my grandfather worked a job he hated at “the mill” so that my father would have a chance to apply for a scholarship that was awarded each year to one of the mill worker’s children. Even with that scholarship, he worked two jobs to put himself through college and he was the first in his family to attend college. After college, he packed up his car and drove across the country to go to graduate school at San Diego State University where he got a Master’s degree in chemistry. He always hoped one of his children would follow in his footsteps and go into the sciences. We didn’t but we were absolutely required to go to college. It never occurred to me that I would do anything else, even if I was following in the footsteps of my English major mother.

Growing up, we knew very little about what our father actually did at work, in part because his work was top secret. One time we were allowed to visit his office and I remember thinking how horrible it was—dark little boxes where people did things that I didn’t understand. Later in life, I realized how much his work meant to him and how much it shaped who he was and how he saw himself in the world. One day, when I was well into adulthood, he told me a story about how he took some new ideas to his bosses and they dismissed his ideas because they challenged the way things were always done. He was frustrated. I saw how he was always trying to make things better, even when people didn’t want his opinion. (He still does this now that he is retired and I am sure he annoys most everyone he tries to help!) I realized how much I am like my father and I try to remember this example when I find myself giving advice where my input was not asked for! Like my father, I have an over-developed sense of responsibility, but we are quite different.

My mother, on the other hand, feels a sense of responsibility, but she is (like me) a people pleaser. She did not do well in school and was often dismissed because she was seen as flighty and not smart. She was a creative type—the opposite of my scientist father. Her father was in the

Air Force and fought in WWII, but was forced to retire when he refused to further his education. Her mother was a teacher, but quit her job when she got married. They moved around a lot and my mother never really established a strong sense of confidence. She was an English major because she loved to read and had started a grad program in journalism but left when she got married. She was a stay-at-home mother until my younger sister went to school and then she started working, doing PR for a non-profit.

Like me, my mother needs to derive meaning from the work that she does. It has to feed her soul. This is totally different from the way that my father approaches work. My mother became a reporter and then an editor and is a writer, and she continues to do this work in her (recent) retirement. In retirement (which I thought would never happen), she has also taken up painting and she does a variety of PR and event-organizing for her husband. She has a hard time saying no, and a hard time taking credit for her work, and goes out of her way to help people. In many ways, she never stops working because she loves what she does. I inherited this approach to work from my mother and I am privileged to be able to do work that feeds my soul and makes a difference in the world. But I have to be careful not to shift into people-pleaser mode. And I learned the hard way (again and again) that work needs a container, even if that container is flexible.

In a recent conversation with my father we got into an argument about expectations for how people should work and I found out quickly just how black and white my father sees the world, a trait that I did not adopt from him. He said that people who are paid a salary should work until the work is done. As he is prone to do, he started to tell a story about someone we knew from my childhood—the director of the San Diego Zoo—and how he would take a two-hour lunch and take a run or how he would come in late the day after a big event the night before. My father found this to be appalling. I could not agree.

I told my father that if people who were paid a salary worked until the work was done, we would never stop working. I expressed how important it is to have work/life balance and how many people (like myself) will nearly kill ourselves if we don't create boundaries and try to limit our work hours. He grumbled and disagreed and we finally had to agree to disagree. I realized that for my father, work was a series of projects that had clear start and finish points. Work has never been like that for me and for many years I poured all my time, energy, and

resources I did not have into my work out of passion and principle and a drive that verged on unhealthy. I almost quite literally killed myself from working too much and giving too much and no praise or recognition could ever be enough. It took many more years and lessons and hard work on myself to shift out of this mode though the drive and passion remain.

I was privileged to have supportive parents who both attended college and who both expected me to go to college. Still, I worked my way through college and took out student loans. I worked side jobs all throughout graduate school. But this work was sometimes meaningful (teaching fitness) and sometimes not so much (making sandwiches, working at a bookstore), and I always made the most of it and saw it as a means to an end. This is the passport that a college education provides. A degree—whatever the degree—gives us opportunities to do meaningful work. Maybe we would rather punch a clock. Maybe we don't have a choice of the work that we do. Maybe we work two jobs and still never make ends meet.

The bigger point I am getting at in these stories is that we need to think about what relationship we want to have to our work. Because our college education opens more doors and possibilities, we need to consider which doors we want to open and how much work we want to do to have access to the doors that may not open as easily. And, we need to remember that education is a privilege and that we have a responsibility to give back to our communities. But, we also need to remember to take care of ourselves and to hold our boundaries so that work does not become everything we do (no matter how much we love it).

**What work have you done to get where you are? How do you hope your work will change when you have a college degree? What kind of work would you like to do? What is your personal philosophy about work? What would make your work meaningful? What kind of work do you not want to do?**



While it is nice to be able to plan ahead, being an interdisciplinary studies student (or, we might argue, generally being a student or a human being) means that we can't plan out every step in advance. All we can do is prepare ourselves. Knowing yourself better and appreciating who you are and what you are good at, as well as what things are more challenging or difficult for you, is an important part of your college career and your journey through life.

Taking steps to grow your genuine connections with people—in and beyond your fields of interest—is key. Many opportunities in life are more about who you know than what you know and a wide network prepares you to strike out into the great unknown. But consider that building relationships relies upon authentic interactions and give and take. Think about what you can do for people, not just what they can do for you. Take care in how you communicate with people, what you ask of them, what you tell them about yourself. For instance, consider emails to be a part of establishing relationships; it is not a text message. Address the person like a good old-fashioned letter and write full sentences.

Another way to take your education to the next level is to take advantage of opportunities for civic engagement, service learning, and internships. Sometimes these words are used interchangeably. Repko and his co-authors describe civic engagement as “the use of nonpolitical as well as political means to affect the quality of life in a community. It flows from the belief that

one can make a difference and indeed that one *can* and *should* play some role in the design or implementation of public policies” (98-9). Civic engagement is a term that is often used in the social sciences and there are a variety of formal opportunities to participate in civic engagement. They continue to argue that we can “touch people’s lives” by “participating in a service-learning project” (99). Such work benefits both the individual and the community; it “involves developing the necessary knowledge, skills, and personal networks in the classroom and then applying these to the world outside of the university” (99). Service-learning is more than just volunteering, it is a “teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities,” according to servicelearning.org (as quoted in Repko 108). It is a valuable way to gain experience, make connections, and make a difference. When we do this work, sometimes we are the ones who reap the most benefits, even if our focus is on helping other people (or animals, or the planet).

However committed we are to making a difference, we need to be mindful of the service work that we are doing. We should not assume that we know best and we should listen and respect the people who show up every day and commit their lives to the work that we may be dropping into for a short period of time. Many times Americans go to do work in “third world” countries and bring an attitude of superiority. Or people in recovery work with addicts and assume that everyone should want to get clean, adopting an abstinence policy when some people are looking for harm reduction. When we participate in civic engagement and service-learning, we cannot bring our own agenda, but we can bring our experience and an open mind and an open heart. Repko and his co-authors argue that “civic engagement flows from a sense of empathy, ethical consciousness, and a heightened sense of responsibility for your community, nation, and the world *as a whole*” (99). Empathy is not the same as sympathy and it is not just putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. And ethical consciousness is not self-righteous, it is a critical awareness.

Service-learning and civic engagement are often projects done within the parameters of a class and an assignment. This work might also be done through internships, though internships can also be more focused on work experience. An internship is usually work that you do and you earn credit for this work. In the INT program we used to require an internship, but it is now

optional. Many students take advantage of getting credit for the work that they are doing in the real world, completing initial paperwork and framing and a reflection at the conclusion of the semester. The catch is that whether you are paid or not paid for internship work, you are still also paying for the internship credits.

**What kind of civic engagement/service-learning work are you interested in doing?**  
**What work are you already doing that you could get credit for?**

# Part IV: Carving a Path: *Doing* Interdisciplinary Studies

By now you might have already figured out that there are a lot of ways to “do” interdisciplinary studies, but many teachers and researchers in the field follow one particular way to “do” interdisciplinarity.

Because I stumbled my way into interdisciplinarity, I had to make my own way and I learned how to do interdisciplinarity through a diverse set of tools, practices, teachers, and experimentations. Creating an Interdisciplinary major/program can be done by stumbling through, but with the help of your advisors, it becomes a lot less like stumbling and a lot more like carving a path. And the type of interdisciplinarity that you do has more available models and examples to draw from. What’s most important is finding the approach to interdisciplinary studies that is the right fit for you.



# Annotating Your Map

Every major has a check sheet. Depending upon your major, you may have different general education requirements than other majors, but the overall general education requirements and purpose are the same for a liberal arts education\* (we might think of liberal arts as the “broad-based” model of education!)—to produce well-rounded, informed, engaged citizens. Many students are annoyed with general education and are annoyed that they are “wasting” their time. However tedious gen ed requirements can be (and however narrow they can be), they are worthwhile and I encourage students to see general education as an opportunity. Gen ed can be a fun (or not so fun) way to learn about a lot of things that we may not have the opportunity to learn about when we get out into the real world, which is full of a variety of demands (as if life during your education is not...!).

In addition to general education requirements, each major has a set of program requirements. Sometimes these requirements have to be taken in sequence, sometimes they don't. Sometimes students are advised to take all of their general education courses first, before taking program requirements. I do not subscribe to this method. If a student takes all of their gen ed courses first, they end up having a lot of 300 and 400- level courses to complete as they try to finish their coursework. This can make something that is already challenging far more arduous.

I recommend finding a balance between gen ed and program requirements as you progress throughout your education. And don't put off the things you dread until the end! Many students find themselves in their final semester wishing that they had taken that dreaded math class or writing class. Each requirement holds the potential to learn and even if it is a miserable experience, we've still learned something in the end!

The Liberal Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies majors operate a little bit differently. I often describe these majors as being the same base of general education. The difference is, with Liberal Studies, you take a bunch of classes and pour them into a container. You have a minor that anchors this mishmash, and many Liberal Studies majors see themselves as students of whatever their minor is and often refer to themselves as, for instance, a history major. But, this is misleading and inaccurate. It's okay for informal conversations, but it is not acceptable for job

applications. Liberal Studies has value and it is my hope that students (in and beyond this class) learn this value and learn to communicate its value. (we'll get to that in the next section.) The Liberal Studies major is multidisciplinary, as opposed to interdisciplinary; however, it can be as interdisciplinary as the student makes it. Interdisciplinarity is purposeful connection and integration—this kind of interdisciplinarity can happen in any major, but it requires conscious engagement.

The Interdisciplinary Studies major is similar to the Liberal Studies major but there are some important differences. First and foremost, there is almost the same base of general education but then there are the anchors of INT 208 as an introduction and INT 495, the Capstone, as a culminating experience. These are like roadside signs that help to guide and direct you. Further, working with their advisors, students name the overall major, which is a name that they can put on their resumes and job/grad school applications. The Primary Area of Study is also named by the student and may or may not be disciplinary in nature. Further, the student also names and shapes two areas of concentration, which are like minors, but they are self-designed. There are also a few electives and an opportunity to do internship work. All of this comes together in the Capstone course, but students also make connections along the way through their coursework and purposeful building of their program.

Established majors often have rigid checksheets and some programs have very little wiggle room. There are important reasons for this rigidity, but rigidity is not the same as rigor. Many people see Interdisciplinary and Liberal studies as being less rigorous than a disciplinary major; however, this is not necessarily the case. Like all things, we get out of our major what we put into it. If a student wants rigor, they can find it in any major. If they want flexibility, they probably should not choose certain programs of study.

If you have not already decided upon your preferred course of study, this is your opportunity to explore different options. If you have chosen, this is your opportunity to reflect upon the components and process for your program. **Take a few moments to reflect upon your Program of Study and your checksheet. Annotate your checksheet, reflecting upon what you have taken (or what you want to take) for your gen ed requirements. Note what you have learned or what you expect to learn. If you have an established checksheet reflect**

**upon what you have taken and what your expectations are for what you have not yet taken. How do these classes relate to, and build upon, one another. Are there aspects that don't make sense to you? Are there aspects you wish you could change? What do you like about this major?**

**If you are a Liberal Studies major, reflect upon your minor and how you see that anchoring your overall major. What opportunities are there in your program for reflection, connection, and integration?**

**If you are an INT major, map out what you want your Primary Area of Study and two Concentrations to look like. What classes do you want to take? Why? How do these areas relate to each other? How do they create a cohesive, interdisciplinary whole?**

\*Liberal arts is not the same as liberal studies, which is the name of the major at UMA. They are similar because they are based upon similar educational foundations, but they mean different things. Students confuse these all the time.

# Research: The Broad Model

As the field has been growing into its own, there is a much more developed and structured approach often referred to as referred to as the Broad Model. Repko and Augsburg both outline a version of this model and “STEPS” (Repko) students can take as they engage in interdisciplinary research. As Repko quotes William H. Newell, one of the founding interdisciplinarians:

An interdisciplinary study has a specific substantive focus that is so broad or complex that it exceeds the scope of a single perspective; interdisciplinarity is characterized by an identifiable process that draws explicitly on disciplines for insights into the substantive focus; those insights must be integrated; and the objective of integration is instrumental and pragmatic—to solve a problem, resolve and issue, address a topic, answer a question, explain a phenomenon, or create a new product. (38)

Augsburg presents “Newell’s 1983 Model of the Integrative Process” (113), which is a precursor to the Broad Model. This Worksheet (slightly adapted) looks like this:

1. Description of interdisciplinary situation
2. Statement of Problem
3. Disciplines that study Problem
4. A list of views: Discipline A views Problem as \_\_\_\_\_; Discipline B views problem as \_\_\_\_\_; Discipline C views Problem as \_\_\_\_\_
5. A list of insights from each of the disciplines in 4: Insights from Discipline A ...
6. Ask yourself which disciplinary insights overlap. Note any common ground among disciplinary insights. Ask yourself how these insights can be integrated ... or not.
7. Sample response, “Using an interdisciplinary approach, I can see that the Problem can/cannot be solved unless ...” OR Using an interdisciplinary approach it is clear that ...”
8. Augsburg adds this step: Review your process. Do you need to go back to a step and expand upon it? Did you miss an important piece?

This approach very much builds upon disciplinary insights and aims for a kind of objectivity and balance. It asks students to pull research from across a variety of disciplines, then to evaluate (but not critique) the sources as well as the insights, and to integrate the insights and perspectives to create an interdisciplinary analysis or approach to a specific topic, issue, or problem, for instance.

This interdisciplinary approach is important, especially for students who are new to interdisciplinary thinking, researching, and writing. It can also be a model for how multidisciplinary teams come together to do interdisciplinary work. Again, for it to be inter- and not just multi-, someone has to integrate the findings of the team. Ideally, the whole team is involved in this process. However, some of us are more inclined toward integration and synthesis than others, especially when the findings vary greatly.

The STEPS that Repko and his coauthors suggest for the Broad Model are similar to Newell's integrative process and read as follows (377-8):

Step 1: Define the problem or state the research question.

Step 2: Justify using an interdisciplinary approach.

Step 3: Identify relevant disciplines.

Step 4: Conduct a literature search.

Step 5: Critically analyze the disciplinary insights into the problem and locate their sources of conflict.

Step 6: Reflect on how using an interdisciplinary approach enlarged your understanding of the problem.

Note that step 5 calls for critical analysis of the disciplinary insights though this critical analysis is about deciding what the most important insights are, not about critiquing the tools, methods, or perspectives that produced these insights. Repko does guide students to critically analyze authors' conclusions, arguments, assumptions, and evidence, which is work that students most likely learn how to do in college writing classes. This critique is embedded in the STEPS process.

As we consider this model for doing interdisciplinary studies/research, what strikes me is that this model seems to be at least as much about justifying interdisciplinarity as it is about the subject that is being researched. The writing that results from this model is engaging with the material in a way that standardizes the results and, perhaps, lends legitimacy to the outcomes. This model helps students and researchers make sense of a variety of perspectives on a singular issue, but it might also lend itself to glossing over the more complex aspects that cannot be contained so easily.

Critical and transdisciplinarity are the kind of interdisciplinarity that I practice, but I did not have a term for it until I started teaching this class. When I began doing interdisciplinary work, it just seemed like the only logical way to approach the material I was studying: the texts and the world around me. This approach is far less structured and more creative. While disciplinary insights may be utilized, critical and transdisciplinarity is far more likely to be toward a critique of disciplinary approaches, which then might lead to an integration with other disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. The methods and approaches to this kind of interdisciplinarity often have a social justice intention and are also often considered to be biased by interdisciplinarians like Repko, as I pointed out earlier. (More on this in the next section.)

Quoting Julie Klein, Augsburg argues that transdisciplinarity is ““far more comprehensive in scope and vision”” (48). The “integrative process” worksheets that Augsburg supplies are more open to transdisciplinary approaches, which might look something like this (adapted from Augsburg’s worksheet 114):

1. Consider a complex phenomena/topic that you are interested in learning more about/doing research on.
2. What makes this a complex topic?
3. Why are you interested in this phenomenon/topic?
4. Consider an argument that you might make about this topic/phenomenon. Your argument should be complex. Essentially you are drafting a working thesis statement that you will revise and adjust as you do research.

For the next steps, rather than gathering *disciplinary* insights, you will gather resources that discuss this problem/issue/topic/phenomenon. They may be disciplinary or they may be interdisciplinary; they may be academic sources or they may be popular sources.

5. Evaluate each resource, considering the author's arguments, biases, and evidence. Select pertinent quotes that you might use to prove or disprove the points that you want to make as you construct your argument.
6. Outline the structure of your paper and adjust your working thesis statement as needed. Consider each sub-argument/point that you want to make and consider what evidence you will use to make your argument.
7. Consider whether you need further examples or evidence to back up your arguments and claims. If so, do further research.
8. Draft a paper that builds an introduction from your working thesis statement and makes it clear that you are approaching this issue from a critical interdisciplinary perspective. What biases do you bring to this work?
9. In your conclusion, briefly recap your argument and offer further food for thought or ways in which the reader might build upon your work for further inquiry or propose an approach toward a solution if relevant.

Both versions of approaching interdisciplinary research are an approach to problem-solving though transdisciplinary researchers would be more likely to argue that we can't solve complex problems and to offer insights that do not attempt to resolve complexity. Again, transdisciplinarity "relies more on theories, concepts, and approaches that literally go beyond and transcend disciplines" (49). This work is messier than the Broad and requires careful reading and writing as well as transparency, which we will consider more in the next section.

# Bias and Perspective: Best Practices

When we do interdisciplinary research and writing, we must *Know Our Biases and Limitations and Be Up Front with Them*. These biases might involve our identity and upbringing or our prior educational experience and the disciplines or interdisciplines through which we are approaching our work. Repko and his coauthors describe this as a “limitation of expertise,” arguing that “every individual brings a slightly different set of skills and knowledge and attitudes to any question” (206). However, this acknowledgement is more directed toward alerting students to be aware of bias in their sources. They also caution us to be aware of our own biases, to interrogate what we think and why we think it, and to make this a part of our reading process (206-7). However they still toe the line that “critical thinking involves treating all arguments with the same degree of informed skepticism” (206). Informed skepticism is certainly a worthwhile endeavor in all pursuits, but even informed skepticism should be critically considered!

In our work it may be enough to state our biases, but we need to be careful not to simply confess our biases and then move on as if they don’t continue to have bearing on the work that we are doing. This is not an easy task to accomplish. Open-mindedness, tolerance of other viewpoints, informed skepticism, critical thinking, and integrity are all important skills to develop toward this aspect of our work.

Not all disciplines or fields, whether interdisciplinary or not, would agree with this tenant of interdisciplinary studies. Some people think that objectivity is not only possible, but ideal. I operate from the assumption that there is no such thing as objectivity and that if we think we are being objective, then we are refusing to consider what might be interfering with our objectivity. We can be as objective as possible if we are upfront with who we are, what we are studying, why we are studying it, what we are leaving out, and what we hope to achieve. This is the only way to approach the kinds of complex topics that we are presented with in our contemporary world. Further, because the world is so complex, we really cannot ever consider every angle, every piece of evidence, every contingency, every option, every variable, and everything that can be considered. We can only do our best.



Doing our best means that we have to be critically vigilant, with ourselves as much as with our sources. Interdisciplinary students have to think outside the box. Even though this term has become one of those over-used metaphors, it is an important aspect of best practices for (critical and creative) interdisciplinary studies. As Repko notes, “integrative understandings have to be created: They are necessarily novel combinations of preexisting ideas” (103). Disciplines are silos; they are boxes. They are limitations. They give us structure and comfort and the ability to have an illusion of a container for the work that we do in this world. Who we are and where we come from—the experience that we bring to our work—is an important aspect of our unique viewpoints. Part of being upfront about our bias is also about foregrounding the ways in which we see the world and the ways in which our experiences give us insights that enrich our interdisciplinary practices. When we know who we are and where we come from, we can let our unique, creative and critical perspectives shine through.

**Consider the biases that you bring to your work. What are they and how do they inform how you see the world? How would you navigate your biases and how would you use them toward creative and critical thinking?**

# Part V: Communicating Interdisciplinary Studies

It is one thing to be an interdisciplinary student, it is another thing to be able to communicate what this means to potential employers, other professors, family, and friends. Since every student is an interdisciplinary student to some degree, being able to express the ways in which your work is interdisciplinary, what this means, and how this aspect of your education adds to your value as a potential employee, is an important skill set.

Disciplinary majors can frame interdisciplinarity as an added value that complements their degree program.

Liberal Studies majors often do not know how to describe their major. Many LS students feel embarrassed by the name of their major and feel like it isn't a legit major. But this couldn't be farther from the truth. A LS major has a valuable degree, especially in this world where everything changes quickly and technology becomes outmoded, data becomes irrelevant, and the state of the world is unstable.

Interdisciplinary majors who create their own INT program are able to speak to the self-design aspects of their education, the ways that they were able to tailor their major to fit their interests and goals, and the ways in which their major makes them unique in a stack of similar applications.

All students can talk about the skills and qualities that we explored earlier, all of which are qualities that employers look for, often more than a specific degree. Of course, for some people interdisciplinarity is confusing and they might feel threatened by something that they can't put in a box or wrap their head around. This is yet another opportunity to be able to talk about the value in an interdisciplinary education.

# A Working Definition

We've explored a variety of ways to define and describe what interdisciplinary studies is. It's important to not rely upon dictionary definitions for most concepts in academia. Instead, it is best to pull from a variety of sources and definitions. In fact, doing so is an interdisciplinary way of defining interdisciplinary studies!

**Brainstorm at least three different ways if defining interdisciplinary studies or interdisciplinarity. Consider your audience and how your definition might change depending upon who you are talking to.**

- **How would you describe interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies in an academic paper?**
- **How would you describe interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies in a graduate school application essay or to a prospective employer?**
- **How would you describe interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies to a friend or family member?**
- **How would you describe interdisciplinarity or interdisciplinary studies to a young person who is unfamiliar with this concept?**

**What other audiences would you potentially need to describe this concept to?**

# The “Elevator Pitch”/Sound Bite

Sometimes you have a very short amount of time to get an idea across and sometimes the context is very important for your future job or education prospects. When someone asks you about your major or asks you what you study, you need to be ready with an answer that exudes confidence and passion. The idea of the “elevator pitch” is a good way to think about this context. How long does the typical elevator ride last? Or, consider this a sound bite—a 30-second opportunity to sell yourself.

Augsburg writes: “you want to be able to tell your story and articulate your ambitions very quickly in a persuasive manner” (174). She offers a template to follow (adapted here):

Hi! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am proud to be from \_\_\_\_\_.

[Could insert something here like a lot of people see Maine as “Vacationland” but .... Something that speaks to preconceptions or provides an interesting fact about where you are from or previews something you are interested in, for instance.]

I am currently a \_\_\_\_\_ major at \_\_\_\_\_ University focusing on \_\_\_\_\_.

I chose this degree because \_\_\_\_\_.

I love this degree because \_\_\_\_\_.

I am very interested in learning more about \_\_\_\_\_ and my education has prepared me well to \_\_\_\_\_.

I plan to graduate from \_\_\_\_\_ with a degree in \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ [year].

After I graduate I plan to \_\_\_\_\_ [or] After I graduate I would like to find meaningful work doing/creating/exploring \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is really important to me and ultimately I would like to \_\_\_\_\_.

I believe my degree will prepare me well to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

Of course, you don't want this to sound too "canned" and you might want to practice saying it out loud a few times and/or practice saying the same thing in different ways.

While the following blurbs were not created for this assignment, they might be helpful toward thinking about a variety of ways to approach this assignment. These were written by past students in this course:

Interdisciplinary studies allow me to look at complex problems from different world views, through the lens of different disciplines. Then I can take those different perspectives and integrate them to create effective solutions to those problems.

Interdisciplinary studies allow me to think differently about problems that may arise in my life and my field of work. It gives me the tools to integrate ideas and think critically about information. It opens my studies to freely flow in the direction that is best suited for my life goals.

INT studies will help me build a better understanding of where I want to have more focus on my field of study. Integrating nutritional health science, mental health and sociology will help me be more well-rounded in my field instead of being focused on one particular subject. It will also give me advantages to solve, create, analysis every situation that might be thrown at me in my field.

Interdisciplinary studies allows me to create a broader base of knowledge by using different pieces of knowledge from many disciplines. By creating a broader base of knowledge instead of a narrow or tunneled knowledge base, I am also actively using non-traditional ways to solve problems by thinking outside of the box.

Teachers are constantly in search of different ways to present information. They have strict guidelines in what they need to teach students and often have disciplines in which they need to teach within. However, I believe interdisciplinary studies is setting me up to teach in my future classroom by giving me a broader knowledge base so I can teach students how the disciplines overlap and work together. It is also setting me up to teach students to solve problems using creativity and involving different tactics.

Interdisciplinary studies allows me to incorporate every skill, strength, and value I have into a career path. As a society, we have learned that when presented with a social problem, there is rarely ever a definitive solution or answer. Interdisciplinary studies allows us to make connections between social problems, research the ways in which the problems intersect and then provide solutions using several approaches.

Interdisciplinary studies will allow me to take classes that my previous major would not have left room for. Being in an interdisciplinary program will allow me to gain insight and awareness around the problems, character traits and common issues that the groups of people I will be helping and counseling will face. When I was in mental health and human services, I was learning how to counsel, how to supervise, and the important factors related to human services while not addressing the populations and different walks of life that I would be interacting with. I hate to be cliché, but I know that interdisciplinary studies will make me a well-rounded student that is versed in all the cultures that I will be working with.

**Now, create your own version of an elevator pitch/soundbite.**

# The Job Talk

The elevator pitch/soundbite is a short blurb that fits in tight spaces, but in some scenarios, you may need more to say. The following description of interdisciplinary studies, written by a student who ended up choosing a different major, wrote the following after our initial consultation about the major. Even though she did not choose the INT major, she grasped its value as well as a variety of the buzz words that often appeal to employers.

“The Interdisciplinary Studies Degree Program is a unique opportunity to tailor your educational experience to suit your ideal vision of your potential. An INT degree allows you to be the master of your own destiny by acting as a flexible structure for students to diversify their development of marketable skills and innovate their future career path. By blending multiple areas of study, students can expand their knowledgebase and enhance their skill-sets in ways that create a synergistic accreditation to channel their passions into well-rounded and informed expertise.

There is an upward trend in cross-training in modern occupational settings; having multi-talented employees who are adaptable to additional responsibilities increases efficacy, efficiency, and lowers employee turn-over while enhancing opportunities for job growth and upward mobility. Applied well to a profession, Interdisciplinary degrees can supply an advantageous edge, saving employers time and training costs, by capitalizing on the versatility of academic integration.

This option is a creative alternative to more traditional disciplines and acts as a multifaceted approach to learning. The prospects for professionals in our evolving culture are virtually endless when they embrace their interests in a clever and original way that offers an array of abilities to their vocation. Combining the elements of various studies and concentrations, students can bridge gaps in our communities, economies, and organizations by acting as intermediaries that fill voids we may not know exist and by giving us something we may not know we need.

In INT we are the mavericks, the problem solvers who look from many angles to see the bigger picture and how those pieces fit together, finding our place as a joining force in the in-

between. Interdisciplinary Studies break down the barriers that limit our options and offerings, which is why I fondly refer to this program as ‘The Best of Both Worlds’ degree.”

**How would you build upon your definition and elevator pitch/sound bite if you were asked to further explain your major and the value it has in the world today?**



# The Statement

When the INT major was first established at UMA (and when I was an interdisciplinary studies student back in the day), students were required to write a kind of rationale for their major, which was included along with an outline of their proposed courses. This Statement was then approved by a group of faculty and sent up a chain of signatures. While the process has changed, the work has shifted from the paperwork, to part of your work for this course.

Regardless of what you call this piece of writing (I will refer to it as a Statement), this is the longer version of your story, but it also provides some details about the content of your program. This Statement will become a part of your Final Portfolio and you can revisit it when you are toward the end of your degree.

Through our conversations and weekly posts, we have been working toward this assignment. As you write this document, you can draw from all of the assignments from this course. While we want these Statements to be as complete as possible, you can consider that this is a draft that represents where you are now and where you want go and it will evolve as your educations and your interests and goals evolve.

Our past assignments and sections of this book have included a number of lists of words and phrases that can help you describe your skills and attributes as a student and as an interdisciplinarian. In your previous weeks' tasks, you have already begun to describe yourself and your skills and characteristics. You can borrow from these tasks for this assignment. Further, your WOWI and personality test results are packed with details and descriptions that you might find helpful in describing yourself.

There are many different ways to approach this assignment; **you will be choosing the approach that best represents where you are in your educational journey.**

For a variety of reasons, this is not an easy assignment. Please let go of perfectionism, set aside humility, and be prepared to speak to your strengths and interests. However, also consider

that this is not a summary or a report—it is a nuanced, thoughtful, maybe even creative piece of writing. This is your opportunity to tell your story.

You have many tools at your disposal, including those from our textbook, from our class discussions, and the UMA Writing Centers!

**In short, and overall, your Statement should include:**

- An overall argument about what kind of student you are and the work you want to do with the education you have earned/are earning.
- Arguments about specific traits, skills, and values that you have, perhaps providing examples of how learned these skills or how you practice them.
- Relevant educational background. Consider what is relevant to showcasing the kind of student you are and what speaks to the overall argument you are making in this Statement. What this overview should not include is a methodical, chronological journey through your education.
- Relevant (and strategic) aspects of your identity, ideas, and life experience.
- How your education is interdisciplinary or how you make interdisciplinary connections or why/how interdisciplinarity is important to your education.

*Intellectual Autobiography*

An Intellectual Autobiography tells the story of your education as well as who you are as a student. Writing this kind of Statement can help you to better understand yourself and your education and can also serve an introduction of yourself and your work to potential employers. Consider that you are making an argument about yourself at the same time that you are telling this story about yourself. Be sure to include specific examples (paint a picture!) to illustrate the points that you are making. Here are a few things to consider:

- Consider your introduction: **how do you draw in your reader?** Is there a story (an anecdote) you can tell about yourself that will draw in the reader and establish a starting point for this piece of writing? Perhaps you can begin with an epigraph—a meaningful quote—and build from there.
- As Augsburg reminds us, “there is no single way to tell your story” (177). What is the message of your story? Is it a narrative of self-discovery? What are the main points you want your reader to take away from this piece?
- This Statement should not be comprehensive. You should not include every single detail of your life or education. Brainstorm examples and then use the best examples to make larger points.
- It should not start with your first days of kindergarten (unless there is a very good reason to do so).
- This Statement need not be chronological, and is probably a stronger piece of writing if it is approached thematically instead.
- You can (and should) use excerpts from your weekly tasks throughout the course to build this piece of writing.
- There is no specific length requirement; however, this piece of writing should be about 2 to 3 pages (double-spaced).

### *Statement of Purpose*

When applying to graduate school you might be asked for a similar kind of statement—a reflection on your past education and experience and an argument that illustrates your interest and potential in graduate school, and a particular program in graduate school. Again, you are making an argument for why you belong in graduate school, generally, and this program, specifically. The details above apply, but your approach is more specifically targeted.

If you are interested in writing this kind of Statement, please do some research and find a program that you would like to apply for (for real or imaginary purposes) and see what instructions they give for this part of the application process.

### *Statement of Interest and Intent*

The Statement of Interest and Intent includes all of the elements described above, but it is also making an argument for your INT major coursework. The Statement of Interest and Intent helps to explain your major and contextualize your courses within your interdisciplinary coursework. Thus, INT majors will also include an overview of their major—their primary area of study and two areas of concentration.

You might consider breaking this assignment into two parts. The first part is your “intellectual autobiography” and the second part is an explanation of your coursework. Neither part needs to be comprehensive. You should be selective with your examples and explain them and use them to make points that you would like to emphasize about your education.

- Explain why you chose your particular Interdisciplinary Major and how it is different from existing UMA majors.
- Explain your understanding of the more general importance of interdisciplinary education.
- Explain your Primary Area of Study, giving specific examples of courses and why they belong in this area.
- Explain both of your areas of concentration and the courses in these areas, as well as how these concentrations complement, extended, deepen, and connect your courses and the components of your major.
- Explain what this major means to your overall educational interests and goals. You should be specific and describe how you see all of the aspects of your major connecting through this INT major. Delineate what skills and knowledge you expect to gain via this course of study.

### *The Statement and Your Final Portfolio/Final Work*

While your final portfolio is your Final for this course, **you might consider this assignment as your Final Paper for this course**. This paper should be thoughtfully crafted and should demonstrate your college writing skills:

- Your ability to **make an argument** (about yourself and your education)
- Your ability to **use specific examples** in your writing that you explain and analyze
- Your ability to **explain** what interdisciplinarity is and **demonstrate** how your education is an example of interdisciplinarity/(and disciplinarity as relevant).
- Your ability to revise and rework writing from other assignments
- This assignment should also **demonstrate your grasp of the concepts and terminology** we have been studying in this course this semester. What kinds of traits, characteristics, and skills do you have as an interdisciplinary student?

# Creative Conceptualization

In addition to a “formal,” written Statement, you might consider creating one or more creative approaches to telling your story and representing yourself as a student. Here are some possible approaches:

*A Collage*—you can make this the good old-fashioned way by cutting and pasting together images (and then taking a picture to include in digital formats). Or, you can make a collage from images you find online. Remember, that collage includes overlap, artful placement for visual affect, and juxtaposition of images and shapes.

*An infographic*—you can use free online software to plug in your info and make it visual. Here are some sources: [Canva](#), [Visme](#), [Picktochart](#), [Picmonkey](#), [Snappa](#). (I have not used any of these but I am going to be playing with Canva soon!)

*A Six-Word Memoir*—Tanya Augsberg introduces this idea in her book. Just Google and you will find a ton of resources and examples. The basic idea is to tell your life-story in six words. You might think of this as your tagline. There are many different ways to go with this and you can even make it a meme or some other kind of visual. Here are a couple of my examples: Education, embodiment, Empowerment. Making tomorrow better. And, Embrace change. Shape a better world.

*A Social Media Post*—Create a TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, or other social media post.

*Autobiographical Map*—quite literally, a map that shows your educational journey in a visual way. (The following is adapted from Augsberg 200-1). Augsberg notes the primary purposes of this assignment as threefold: assess the effect of past experiences on your present, explore the life experiences that have shaped who you are, and to identify specific goals.

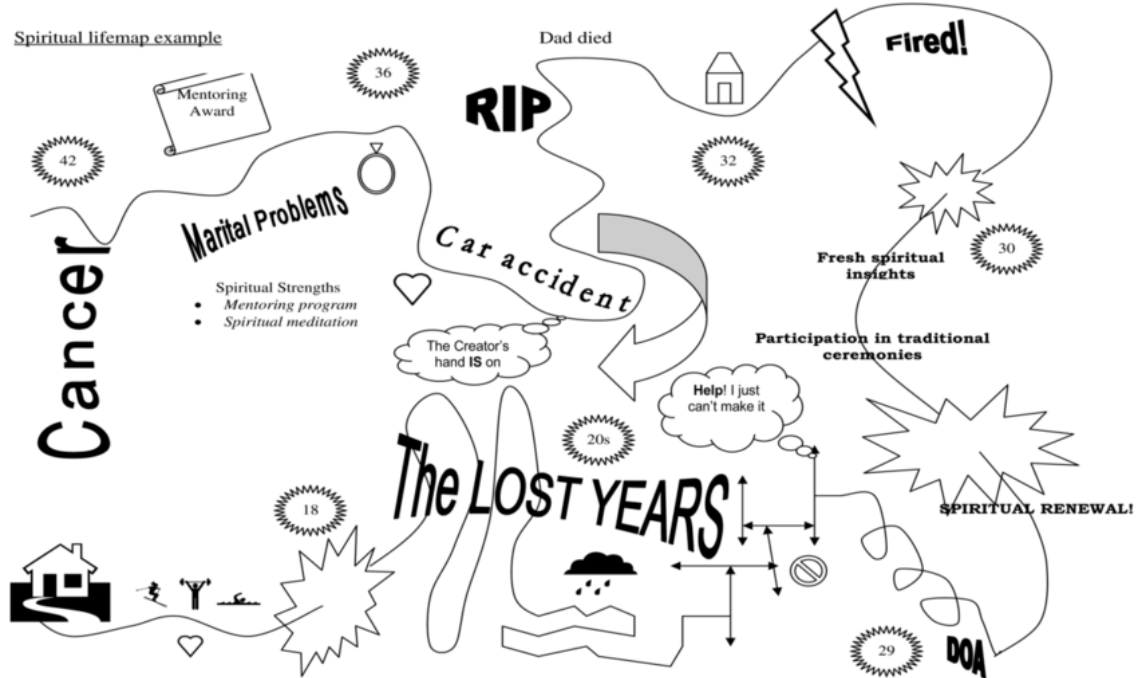
Maybe your map is a journey of discovery or the literal or figurative ground you have covered in your educational journey. Your map should include: topographical and political elements, boundaries, roads, sites of significance, cities, and towns and may convey territory you

Your map might include the development of your value system and/or illustrate the structure of your interdisciplinary major. Here's an opportunity to visually show how all of your interests and academic areas fit into your life.

Here are a couple of examples (these aren't the best examples, but they give you a picture, literally):



Spiritual lifemap example





# Putting It All Together & Taking It Out Into the World

Your Final for this course is a Portfolio, which you begin in this course and then revisit when you are almost ready to graduate.

**This Final Portfolio is a cumulative assignment for this course, but it might also act as a showcase of your (academic) work and who you are as a student and/or citizen.** This Portfolio might be something you create only for this class, but it can have ongoing uses for you throughout your education and work life.

Most graduate programs ask for some kind of personal statement. Often, they want to know who you are, what kind of student you are, and what you will add to their program/university. Some grad programs will want to see a portfolio of your work.

Employers want to know what skills and experience you will bring to the position you are applying for. Your portfolio communicates your skills and knowledge to a future employer—it also communicates who you are as a whole “package.”

You can revise this Portfolio for future job applications or graduate school applications. If you are an INT student, you will create a final version of this Portfolio during your Capstone course (INT 495).

Remember the many different interdisciplinary skills that our book highlights and how you can illustrate the qualities that you have as a student, and citizen, who is prepared to work and live in our complex world.

## **MODE/PLATFORM AND FORMAT**

**You will decide what mode and format your electronic portfolio will take. You will decide what computer program you will use to create your portfolio.** Consider what the following modes or platforms (224) might provide for your portfolio and which one you are most comfortable working within:

Website: Google Drive, Wordpress, Weebly, or another free platform can provide you with a template that you build upon. Can be easily shared with a link. Please do not spend money for this platform. There are many free options.

PowerPoint: A linear layout that moves from slide to slide. Readers click from one page to the next. Can use the Google version.

Prezi: A more visually interesting version of power point that allows you to cluster together related information. Can be easily shared with a link.

Google Doc: A linear document that the reader scrolls through from top to bottom. Can be easily shared with a link to the document (or slides). Easy to print or download as a pdf, but might also be multi-modal (include pictures and hyperlinks, for instance).

Word: A linear document that the reader scrolls through from top to bottom. More design tools and flexibility than Google Docs. Easy to print or download as a pdf, but might also be multi-modal (include pictures and hyperlinks, for instance).

**Within one of these modes, you will also be deciding upon how to format your portfolio.**

You can use the rough outline below of required contents to organize your portfolio; however, you can arrange these elements as you see fit. Some of these elements might be combined and you might choose to label them differently. Consider how to contextualize the artifacts you select.

## **CONTENT**

You will decide what content your portfolio includes, but for this assignment for this class, you will include the following:

- An introduction of about 100-200 words. Short and sweet overview that acts to inform your reader about what they will find in your portfolio. Consider the importance of an effective home or welcome page (225-6).
- A short “About Me” section that provides your reader with some basic information about you (your major, any service to your school or community, relevant biographical information) and your educational/professional goals.

- Your Statement of Interest and Intent/Intellectual Autobiography, which has been revised based on the feedback that you got from me and from peer review and/or the Writing Center.
- An annotated overview of your coursework/major program. (For INT majors, here you can use the portion of your Statement of Interest and Intent that details your major courses). This should be selective rather than comprehensive.
- A writing sample. A paper or another piece of writing you have completed for any class. You should consider revising this writing sample and providing an introduction/context.
- A sample of another piece of your work. This might be a writing sample, but it might also be a different kind of assignment or project that illustrates your work and who you are as a student.
- A statement, illustration, or some other way of expressing how you are an interdisciplinary studies student. This can be embedded in another portion of your portfolio or it might be in a separate section. This section should speak to the specific skills or kinds of intelligence you have developed as a result of doing interdisciplinary work and how your education has prepared you for living and working in the complex world we all live in.
- Reflective elements/elements that contextualize your artifacts.

In addition to these required contents, **you can add anything else** to this portfolio that you would like to include. For instance, you might include a resume or curriculum vitae. You might include your 6 word memoir, your elevator pitch, or an Autobiographical map, for instance.

Your portfolio should include both **written and visual elements**. Consider what colors and styles to use. What visuals will be aesthetically pleasing and represent who you are? Consider whether your portfolio will include a picture of you or only pictures that represent you.  
(210)

You can **name these areas (above) whatever you like** as long as all the elements exist in your Portfolio. Decide what headers to use, how to divide and define different sections of your portfolio, how the person looking at your portfolio navigates from one section to the other, how the sections link and flow.

## OVERALL REFLECTION

In addition to the portfolio contents, you should also include a separate brief reflection (300 to 500 words) to be submitted via BrightSpace. In this reflection, you should tell me about your portfolio and why you made the choices you made. Be specific. You should explain what skills and knowledge are presented through your work. You should also explain what changes you would make if you were to use this portfolio when applying to jobs or graduate schools or how you see this Portfolio growing as you continue your education.

How do you illustrate your skills and knowledge?

*Examples:*

Prezi/Wendi Luther: <https://prezi.com/view/doYe1XhG94NVEkKgoTDK>

Tumblr/Chelsea Kidd: <http://chelseaekidd.tumblr.com>

Google Sites/Celena Zacchai: <https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/celenazacchai/home>

Wix/Joseph Spiller: <https://josephspiller.wixsite.com/josephspiller>

Google Sites/Bailey Hudson: <https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/bailey-hudson/academics>

A portfolio example: [pierrelaot.com](http://pierrelaot.com)

Pierre explains: “I created my portfolio back in France when I was working on CIS degree.

I was working on a personal project which was a video game. It wasn’t an assignment and all I lean to do this wasn’t in class but on the Internet. This was me wanted to go farther, to do better and learn things that I can’t learn in school, because I was thinking about my future and how I wanted to have the best opportunities for my career. When I published the game, I created this portfolio because I wanted to keep a trace of what I do and to be able to share it.

Some people will type your name on the internet (especially employers) and I wanted to use it as an advantage. My goal was to have this portfolio at the top of the page when you search Pierre Laot on google.”

My websites might also provide a kind of an example (though it is not exactly a portfolio):

[www.cultureandmovement.com](http://www.cultureandmovement.com)

*Side note for future iterations of your portfolio:*

You should consider what kind of personal information and images you are including throughout the portfolio.

First, you should decide what your personal information says about your skills, values, and experience.

Depending upon your experience and the job/position you are applying for, personal information might hurt you or help you.

Consider security issues and copyright issues.

# Part VI: Tools

“Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.”

—Bertoldt Brecht

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

—Audre Lorde

“Your heart is a weapon the size of your fist. Keep fighting. Keep loving.”

—Graffiti on a wall in Palestine

The tools included here offer practical skills that will help any student succeed. The first section helps you develop your writing skills across, between, and among the disciplines.

The third section provides techniques that develop the mind and body and help us to do the work of education—learning, thinking, writing, discussing, measuring, evaluating, designing, collaborating, and creating—while finding balance and wellness.

# College Writing as Interdisciplinary Studies

“That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood all your life, but in a new way.”

“Think wrongly, if you please, but in all cases think for yourself.”

—Doris Lessing

" . . . Learning to write is not a matter of learning the rules that govern the use of the semi-colon or the names of sentence structures, nor is it a matter of manipulating words; it is a matter of making meanings, and that is the work of an active mind."

—Ann E. Berthoff, as quoted by James A. Berlin

“It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”

—Ursula K. Le Guin

College Writing prepares students to write according to academic conventions that cross disciplines. Even though each discipline has specific rules and norms for writing, there are some basic tools that can help you develop your writing in ways that make it adaptable across disciplines as well as ways that lend themselves to writing interdisciplinary papers.

In my College Writing (ENG 101) class I give students an idea of the relationship between and among the disciplines. I exaggerate and mock the ways in which disciplines see each other and the weaknesses that we see in other disciplines, especially when we assume that our way is the best.

For instance, I explain that sometimes people in the sciences will determine that those in the social sciences are not practicing “real” science, and those in the social sciences will often consider work in the humanities to be less rigorous or important compared to their more logical,

methodical treatment of culture and society. I sarcastically describe the ways in which the humanities folks tend to be afraid of science and math and avoid both at all costs. All of these divisions are cemented by disciplinary organization and segregation.

As we consider the methods and ways of seeing that each of these areas brings to our consideration of, for instance, a theme or to writing itself, it becomes clear to students that these divisions have important functions, but that they are often arbitrary. And these divisions often get in the way of seeing all the sides to an issue, all the players in the game, and all the shades to the pictures.

College Writing can help students to see the ways in which disciplines and knowledge are connected, despite different citation formats and different structure to writing projects. The tools I outline here are the basics to successful college writing, but they are applicable to a wide array of college endeavors, especially within interdisciplinary frameworks.

**If you are unsure about the expectations of an assignment, just ask.** We rely upon our students to let us know what works and doesn't work. Sometimes we think our instructions and writing prompts are clear when they are not. Sometimes we offer too much instruction, sometimes not enough.

**Read. Read. Read.** Read the instructions for assignments carefully. **And then read some more:** Read everything. Read for pleasure. Read real books, made of paper. Read e-books and blogs and articles and graphic novels. The more you read, the more you get a sense of what effective writing is. The more you can recognize ineffective writing, the more you can work to emulate the effective techniques consciously and defend writing choices. Reading engages the mind and trains the body.

**Write. Write. Write.** The more you write, the better you get. Share your writing. Read it aloud. Try different kinds of writing. Write for fun. Pre-write. Revise and re-write. Writing is a process. It takes work. Find inspiration from your favorite writers.

**Don't let jargon rule you.** Being familiar with the jargon of academia more generally, of individual disciplines, of interdisciplinarity, and of writing specifically, can be overwhelming at



times. Don't be intimidated and don't use words or concepts until you are ready. Jargon is just language that is trying to communicate complicated and novel ideas. The more you read and study, the more you will become comfortable with this language. Being interdisciplinary also means being proficient in the languages of many disciplines—at least to a certain extent.

**Grammar is a set of rules, but, more importantly, it is a set of tools.** The more you know about the rules, the more you can use them as tools to make the points you want to make. Many teachers will be sticklers about the rules, whether enforcing academic standards or fostering clear communication. Generally, we are concerned more about the content of the paper, the argument, the use of evidence, the clarity of organization, and the whole.

**The basics of every paper begin with a thesis statement.** Even if you are not writing a traditional academic paper, even if you are innovating on format, what you are saying in your paper should be clear to your reader. Your thesis statement is not a question. Still, thesis “statement” is misleading. Your thesis is an argument and you should always ask of your thesis: “so what?” What is so interesting and important about what you have to say?

**Rhetorical Questions** can be used effectively, but should not be overused. If you are asking too many questions in your paper, you aren't making your case. What questions move your argument forward? What questions keep your reader thinking even after they have finished reading? Questions are important to ask yourself as you consider resources, construct arguments, and analyze ideas.

**Look for Patterns, Connections.** Integration is more than compare and contrast. Again, ask yourself, “so what?” What is interesting, compelling, problematic, original, or enlightening about this pattern or set of connections? What can you teach your reader about the texts, or the bigger world, through these patterns?

**Use evidence effectively.** Every piece of evidence you use should be incorporated into your argument and integrated into your sentences. You should introduce the quote and you should provide analysis of the quote that shows the relationship of this piece of evidence to your larger argument. Don't just re-state—extrapolate, question, analyze, riff, synthesize.

**Know when to be concise and when to elaborate.** Lengthy descriptions of too many details can definitely weaken your paper. It can also take up space that you can use more effectively.

Sometimes a brief summary is needed to make a point, but keep it brief. At the same time, I often tell my students that for every quotation or every piece of evidence you should have at least two sentences of commentary and analysis. This two sentences is *minimum* and is not a steadfast rule; in most cases more analysis is always better.

**Transition between sentences and between paragraphs.** Don't assume that your reader understands the connections you are making. This is the case in all writing, but is especially important for students doing interdisciplinary writing. Respect your audience, but assume that they need you to lead them through your argument.

**Offer observations, connections, analysis; don't try to solve all the problems of the world.** Once we start to be exposed to bigger ideas and problems, it can be tempting to try to solve them through your argument and paper. Don't give into this temptation. Most issues cannot be solved by dissertations, books, or collaborative research endeavors. What we can do is offer insights and join the larger conversation. Sometimes we might offer solutions, but we should recognize our own limitations.

**Be informed, but recognize your limitations.** You have to read a lot and skim a lot and ask a lot of questions and write a lot of drafts. There's always another source that can add insight. So, be clear what the expectations of the assignment are, and remember that you can't cover everything. Tools of summary and paraphrasing are good to have, but always cite your sources.

**Don't leave citations, bibliographies, or sources until the end.** Keep track of your sources and citations from the beginning and your work will be much smoother in the end. I offer this advice as a result of multiple, repeated failures to do so in my own work.

**Be careful (and firm) with the "I."** A lot of professors will tell you that you cannot write in the first person. While this is the standard for writing in the science and social sciences, as well as in many fields within the humanities, the idea that you can write what you think about a topic and how you understand the pieces as they come together is misleading and misguided. Even when not writing in first person, whatever you write is what you know and what you think about what you know. How we frame our argument, the resources that we use, the language, the connections, are the work of the individual interdisciplinary researcher/writer. Even as your

writing is your voice and your “opinion,” you should still work to minimize the use of “I.” I think, I feel, I believe are all superfluous. Find your voice and don’t be afraid to use it.

**Be equally careful with the “You.”** The “you” is often used in hypothetical ways, but it should only be used when directly addressing the reader. I use “you” here when I am talking directly to the reader/student about something that you might do to better understand or practice interdisciplinarity. You might think you want to address the reader, but it’s always important to consider your audience—which is bigger than your professor, but still includes us. We can be problematic, but rephrasing from “you” to “we” is almost always a better choice. I use “we” here because we are all writers, myself included. But “we” is generally a collective “I.” Be careful whom you are speaking for, but be brave too.

Mostly, be purposeful and conscious with voice and argument.

**Write and revise and write and rewrite and polish, but know that writing is never finished.**

There is no getting around the need for multiple drafts. Some professors will want to see all your drafts; some will want to see none. Some writing will be timed or in-class writing. As you consider all of the advice on this list, you are working toward revision. As you clean up typos and small errors, you are proof-reading. Know the difference. Do both. Accept that there are an average of at least three errors per published page, but strive toward perfection.

# Self-Care for the Mind and Body

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

—Audre Lorde

It wasn't until after years of working myself to the bone that I learned the importance—or even the existence—of the concept of self-care. Recently, self-care has become a sort of buzz word and trend and it is often divorced from the idea of practicing self-care to balance the service we perform or the oppressive structures that we navigate. Self-care is too often reduced to mimosas and pedicures. It is about so much more and, at root, self-care is about self-love and self-compassion. I have to work hard to care for myself and for the past few years I have been including a self-care project in most of my classes.

While self-care is important for everyone—and while anyone in academia may benefit from self-care—self-care is especially important for those who work in the service professions, who spend a significant portion of time serving others.

Self-care is also important for considering the whole person. While we are students, we are also a lot of other things too—employee, partner, parent, family member, friend, etc. Self-care helps us to keep a healthy balance and to be present for all the people in our lives who need us. It also helps keep us together.

Self-care is also an important concept in terms of interdisciplinary studies because such a path requires determination, an open-mind, attention to details, a sense of the bigger picture, patience, vision, and more. In fact, self-care is an important function of interdisciplinary studies. Many of the ideas about self-care here come from the integrative work of educators like Bo Forbes.\* Bringing together yoga, mindfulness, therapy, movement studies, and neuroscience, interdisciplinary researchers are discovering mind/body connections that, in turn, might inform how interdisciplinary studies are practiced.

The tools here are practical and proven, but require commitment and practice—much like interdisciplinary studies. Thus, these tools are practical as well as metaphorical. They are also

often segregated from academia, a space that prefers a focus on the mind, sometimes with the neglect of the body.

I first heard the term self-care many years ago at a National Women's Studies conference, at a panel with the Crunk Feminist Collective. Brittany Cooper spoke to the importance of self-care, following the well-worn quote (which is a prolific meme) by Audre Lorde: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare," which she wrote in a 1988 essay collection, *A Burst of Light*. The concept blew my mind! Was I allowed to practice self-care? Like many ideas foundational to social justice and women's empowerment, the concept has its roots in Black feminist movement. It took me many more years to give myself permission to practice self-care and it is still something I have to constantly give myself permission to do, even though I give my students permission all the time.

The first requirement of self-care is that we earn the right to claim self-care through service to others. It is not just about having "girl time" or a time out. Self-care is not about pedicures and mimosas (though these things might be involved). It is about recharging our resources so that we have enough energy to sustain us and more energy to give without giving too much of ourselves. The idea that "you can't pour from an empty cup" is helpful for understanding the toll that giving and giving and giving can take on a person. The other analogy of putting on your oxygen mask first is a popular way of considering self-care. Of course, if someone has never flown on an airplane, they will have no idea what this means! But many women are tasked with taking care of everyone first, whether we put this expectation on ourselves or other people—kids, spouses, family, friends—demand it of us.

Self-care is becoming increasingly recognized as an important practice especially for those most oppressed by systems and structures and for activists working to change these systems and structures. At its root, it is about being in touch with ourselves enough to determine what we need to sustain ourselves and nurture ourselves to grow. Bo Forbes talks about self-care in relationship to restorative yoga and asks what it might mean to literally give ourselves the support and comfort that we need. Many of us do not even considering that giving ourselves support is something that we are allowed to do.

Self-care might not be something that you do; it might be about doing less. It might be about giving ourselves permission to relax, to produce less, to take time off and enjoy life. I assign a self-care project in almost every academic class I teach and I find that students often have a whole list of things they are going to do for self-care. I often suggest that these students scrap that list and do nothing as their self-care project. Sometimes I beg students to do nothing or to see the value in doing less. Many of these projects are successful, but most students cannot sustain self-care throughout a semester, even if it is just a little thing or doing nothing. This assignment ends with a reflection, so even when the self-care fails, the lessons that students take from the project is what is important. And in this reflection, all of the students find success. Some even find new ways of living.

Making a commitment to self-care can also be about practicing self-love and self-compassion. Self-compassion is a kind of self-care and has to do with countering and re-scripting negative self-talk and treating yourself with the same compassion that you show other people in your life. If we cannot be compassionate to ourselves, then how can we be compassionate toward other people? When I started studying self-care, self-compassion, and radical self-love, I started to notice just how toxic we are to ourselves. On a 70<sup>th</sup> birthday trip to Chicago for my mother, I was appalled at the way that my sister talked about other people, constantly criticizing. And then I realized that she was just as critical of herself, if not more so. Several months later I visited my mother-in-law and could not believe how negative she was toward herself. She beat herself up about the smallest things, calling herself stupid when she got lost going to a place she had never been before, punishing herself for making small mistakes, refusing to go in the pool at her retirement complex (when no one else was there!) because she was too fat and did not want to be seen. She has been doing this to herself for her entire life and it devastated me to think that at nearly 80-years-old she could not let go of some of her self-criticism. And then there's my own mother who can't take a compliment. Her art was hanging in the women's bathroom at a restaurant her husband's family owns and when a woman exclaimed about how much she loved the art my mother didn't bother to mention that she was the artist. Seeing these behaviors in my family members, very quickly helped me shed most of my self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors. None of these women are ready to hear that it is okay to love themselves despite whatever flaws they imagine. Witnessing it is devastating.

Well-known authors like Brené Brown and Kristin Neff are leaders in the self-help field and movement and offer a variety of tools, books, podcasts, email lists that resonate with many people. I have only scratched the surface of their work, in part because I only recently discovered it and, in part, because their work does not speak to me in the same ways that other similar work speaks to me. (It's a little too white bread for me, but that's my judgmental American bitch talking. Brené Brown is profound, prolific, and well-respected.) I get periodic emails from Neff, which reinforce the practice and importance of self-compassion and she often includes a guided visualization or meditation. She provides plenty of free content as well as trainings and workshops. Brené Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection* was helpful when I was looking for another tool in my process of self-discovery, healing, and self-love. And *Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience* is packed with helpful information for understanding our emotions—87 emotions, in fact! She is also a professor and she does research on shame and vulnerability. One of her most recent books, *You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience*, is co-edited with #MeToo co-founder Tarana Burke and includes a diversity of Black women's voices and experiences.

Sonya Renee Taylor's movement, website, and book, *The Body Is Not An Apology*, revolutionize the idea of self-love—radical self-love—the best kind of self and community care. My students love this book and most devoured it in a couple of days, even though I had stretched the assigned reading out over several weeks of my Embodied Social Justice course. As she explains, ““using the term radical elevates the reality that our society requires a drastic political, economic, and social reformation in the ways in which we deal with bodies and body difference” (8). She connects self-love to the larger systems and structures that we intervene in when we learn to have love for ourselves. For instance, she argues, “When we decide that people's bodies are wrong because we don't understand them, we are trying to avoid the discomfort of divesting from an entire body-shame system” (21). I could quote almost every sentence in this golden book. Taylor writes accessibly and she only asks of her reader what she is willing to ask of herself. Her message is inspiring: “... we must become architects of a world that works for everybody and every body” (82).

\*See Bo Forbes' website for more information about her integrative work.

**Get physical to balance out all the mental:** Any kind of physical activity is a good balance to all of the mental work of academia. When reading, writing, and researching, our bodies also get locked into rigid postures and we sit still for long periods of time. Any movement you enjoy is the movement to do. A short walk, a hard run, a dance class, swimming, yoga, Tai Chi, weight lifting, gardening, sex. Certainly there are benefits in variety.

There is some interesting interdisciplinary research that shows that novel movement—new movements that our body is not used to—can help to increase neuroplasticity and actually rewire our brains. We walk and move in very linear and structured ways—just like we learn in rigid and structured ways. Novel movement is akin to interdisciplinary studies—both move our minds and bodies in new ways. In the future, interdisciplinary science will tell us more about the importance of movement, but already the mind/body connection is strong.

**Stretch:** With or without the precursor of physical activity, stretching aids in recovery from activity and increases flexibility—a metaphor for interdisciplinarity. While stretching the body helps to counter the rigid postures of academia, it can also help our mental work, especially combined with conscious breathing.

**Conscious breathing:** Paying attention to your breath sounds too simple to be a tool, but it's an important one for reducing stress. Conscious breathing is the most basic form of yoga; it is also a tool in mindfulness and meditation practices. Take deep, slow breaths—in through the nose, out through the nose—to promote a calm, mind and body. Fill your chest, ribcage, and lungs with your breath. Make your exhale longer to promote relaxation. There are a variety of breathing techniques to explore.

**Mindfulness:** In addition to paying attention to your breathing, mindfulness asks us to bring attention to movement and breath, to move more slowly—mentally and physically—than we are used to. Mindfulness can be practiced in a variety of ways and includes paying attention to sensation, to how the body feels.

**Meditation:** There are many different forms of meditation that can be explored and developed over time. Meditation can be done moving, standing, sitting, laying. It can be done as a part of a yoga class or apart from it. Alone or in groups, inside or outside. Meditation is connected to mindfulness and conscious breathing.



**Sing/Hum/Sway/Listen to Music:** Music is healing. Just listening to music—any music that moves you can be a stress reliever. Marconi Union, theta wave music, and Solfeggio frequencies are some examples of music that is specifically designed to help to calm and relax our minds and some offer tones designed to produce specific effects. But we don't need music to produce these effects. Singing and humming can bring us comfort and ease. Swaying to our own sounds or the sounds of our favorite music is another simple way to self-soothe and center ourselves.

**Massage Therapy:** Massage therapy is a privilege, but it is not a luxury. There are many different kinds of massage therapy that can provide relaxation and relief from tight muscles, promoting health and healing. Many therapists practice a variety of techniques and can work with the client to find the best treatment. Sometimes campuses have student rates or free massage during special events.

**Mental Health Therapy:** The stigma around therapy is lightening. Therapy can be a helpful tool to help us to better understand who we are and where we want to go. It can help us manage stress, process trauma, and ease anxiety. The relationship of therapist and client is important. We should find the right person to work with, but we can also take advantage of student counselling services and employee benefit programs. Both are often free.

**Get Sleep:** Our culture devalues one of the best tools for self-care. We have too much to do and we don't have enough time for restful, rejuvenating sleep. But the more we sacrifice this aspect of self-care, the more harm we do to ourselves. Studies have shown that the effects of sleep deprivation are like the effects of aging. Our performance and engagement suffer when we don't get enough sleep. A nap can help to add to missed sleep the night before.

**Eat Well:** Food fuels our bodies and our minds so it only makes sense that the better we eat, the better our minds and bodies will function. But food is complicated in our world—a function of privilege and a commercialized and politicized realm. Eating is cultural and psychological. Food is also a basic necessity. If you suffer from disordered eating, mindful eating might be worth further exploration.

**Honor Your Feet/Seek Uneven Landscapes:** Interdisciplinary research is also showing the connection between the feet and the rest of the body—physical, mental, and emotional. Simply walking (or dancing or doing yoga) barefoot can help to awaken the rest of the body and its

connections with the mind. The nerve connections in our feet begin to be turned off as our feet are locked into our shoes and our environments are more and more paved and regulated. When we wake up our feet, we wake up more than our feet. It might sound a little crazy and downright impossible; however, it is worth exploring to see if it works for you.

**“Treat Yo’Self”:** On the TV show *Parks and Recreation*, Donna and Tom have a special day where they treat themselves to all the luxuries they don’t usually get: pedicures, massages, shopping, eating. While this comedic representation is exaggerated for effect, the principle is important. The more you serve others (students, children, partners, parents, clients, etc.), the more important it is to give yourself a break. This treat can be as simple as a bit of time for yourself, or as luxurious as your budget allows.

**Serve Others:** If your life is a series of treats, then perhaps service is more appropriate. But, all of us can serve others as a way of promoting self-care. Some interdisciplinary classes might even incorporate service learning (or civic engagement) into the curriculum. Since education is a privilege, we have some obligation to give back to our communities.

All of these self-care tools are in your toolbox. What works for you is up to you to discover. These are tools to experience and experiment with, and since they work differently for different people, they are best experienced without preconceived expectations.

## An Endnote for Students and Readers

There are many different ways to practice and understand interdisciplinarity. One of the assumptions and latent arguments that undergirds this work is the idea that “civic engagement” and interdisciplinarity go hand in hand. This relationship connects the university and the real world and ensures interdisciplinarity’s relevance. There are at least two other important aspects of interdisciplinarity that I do not develop here: the importance of an international/global perspective and the potential of technology.

The ideas I offer here skew toward the humanities for a variety of reasons. I work primarily in the humanities, and while social sciences are a significant part of my interdisciplinary work, the disciplinary line between humanities and social sciences can be difficult to negotiate. Sometimes the sciences are more easily integrated into the humanities, especially through my favorite medium—speculative fiction (or science fiction or dystopian fiction). Humanities texts have impacted the work of real science, sometimes providing an element of imagination that inspires innovation and reinvention.

However, the humanities also provide an important role in interdisciplinary studies because the humanities provide connections—the “sticky stuff”—a myriad of texts that explore human experiences and a set of lenses that establish the way we make sense of the world. Humanities are a significant portion of a liberal arts education and general education requirements (even as these requirements are contested and as they differ from institution to institution). Thus, every student experiences a humanities lens, making this lens a starting point for interdisciplinarity.

Any way we get to interdisciplinarity works. The universe of interdisciplinarity has many ways in and many dimensions we are only beginning to explore.

## Works Cited\*

- Anderson, Mark Cronlund and Irene Maria F. Blayer, Eds. *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature: Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Narratives in North America*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. Print.
- Augsburg, Tanya. *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. DuBuque, Iowa, 2016.
- Calhoun, Craig and Cora Marrett. "Forward." *Interdisciplinary Research: Case Studies from Health and Social Science*. Frank Kessel, Patricia L. Rosenfield, Norman B. Anderson, eds. Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Clair, R.P. *Zombie Seed and the Butterfly Blues: A Case of Social Justice*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2013. Print.
- Crowe, Malcolm "Research Today." *Interdisciplinary Research: Diverse Approaches in Science, Technology, Health and Society*. John Atkinson and Malcolm Crowe, eds. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2006. Print.
- Haynes, Carolyn, Ed. *Innovations in Interdisciplinary Teaching*. American Council on Education. (With the support of the Association for Integrative Studies). Oryx Press. Series on Higher Education, 2002. Print.
- Huston, Aletha C. "A Path to Interdisciplinary Scholarship." *Interdisciplinary Research on Close Relationships: The Case for Integration*. Lorne Campbell and Timothy J. Loving, eds. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012. Print.
- "Closing Commentary: Fostering Interdisciplinary Research: The Way Forward" Patricia Rosenfield and Frank Kessel. Frank Kessel, Patricia L. Rosenfield, Norman B. Anderson, eds. *Interdisciplinary Research: Case Studies from Health and Social Science*. Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Klein, Julie Thompson. *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity: The Changing American Academy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. Print.
- Lattuca, Lisa. *Creating Interdisciplinarity: Interdisciplinary Research and Teaching Among College Faculty*. Vanderbilt Issues in Education. Nashville, TN. Vanderbilt UP, 2001. Print.
- Miller, Toby. *Blow Up the Humanities*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2012. Print.
- Repko, Allen F. with Michelle Phillips Buchberger and Rick Szostak. *An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014. Print.
- Rowe, John W. "Introduction: Approaching Interdisciplinary Research." *Interdisciplinary Research: Case Studies from Health and Social Science*. Frank Kessel, Patricia L. Rosenfield, Norman B. Anderson, eds. Oxford UP, 2008. Print.

\*I do not cite the sources for the epigraphs, only the works discussed in the text. In the next section I provide more resources for further study.

I have not fully updated the Works Cited and it is in an older style of MLA citation format. While this book roughly follows MLA citation style, it should NOT be taken as a good example of proper academic citation protocols. Do as I say not as I do!

## Other Interdisciplinary Resources

*This brief selection of resources will get you started beyond this book. I've organized these resources in sections that reflect Universal Interdisciplinarity's ideas and structure.*

### Interdisciplinary Introductions

The books by Repko and Klein in the works cited section are both good books for more introduction to interdisciplinarity. Repko's work is oriented toward research but about half of the book provides definition and discussion about disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Tanya Augsburg's *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* provides a good introduction, especially to students new to an INT major or interdisciplinary program.

Klein's work is more based in the Humanities and Cultural studies. She has written a lot of books. *Humanities, Culture, and Interdisciplinarity* is my preferred intro text. She also provides an excellent bibliography in *Creating Interdisciplinary Campus Cultures: A Model for Strength and Sustainability*.

R.P. Clair's *Zombie Seed and the Butterfly Blues: A Case of Social Justice* (from the works cited section) provides a compelling introduction and valuable ideas about interdisciplinarity and stories; however, the novel is not worth the read. There are much better novels we can use to apply Clair's introduction. For instance, several of my favorite books invite an interdisciplinary analysis: Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* or *A Tale for the Time Being*\*; Alaya Dawn Johnson's *The Summer Prince* (YA dystopia); Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*.

\*These Ozeki books are also recommended by my colleague, Lisa Botshon, who has excellent taste in novels. It took me a while to read a book about meat—as a vegetarian, the topic is not on my list of favorites—but this is one of the best books I've read.

### Resources for Interdisciplinary Research

Repko also has a book called *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* that is even more research-oriented, as the title suggests. Much of the material in this book repeats from *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*, but the book is a solid textbook for interdisciplinary research.

*Enhancing Communication & Collaboration in Interdisciplinary Research*, edited by Michael O'Rourke, Stephen Crowley, Sanford D., Eigenbrode, and J.D. Wulforst, is an extensive book, including preface, intro (ch1 and 2: communication and collaboration), Part I: Theory, Part II: Case Studies, Part III: Tools, Part IV: Contexts, Part V: Conclusion.

John Atkinson and Malcolm Crowe, eds. *Interdisciplinary Research: Diverse Approaches in Science, Technology, Health and Society* is a “book is for research activists, especially those

involved in education institutions and research degrees" (xi). It aims to "provide windows into a variety of approaches" in the hopes that "armed with this information and insight, readers will consider their research questions and challenges from a broader base" (xi).

The foreword and introduction to *Interdisciplinary Research: Case Studies from Health and Social Science*, edited by Frank Kessel, Patricia L. Rosenfield, Norman B. Anderson, are particularly useful to understanding interdisciplinarity generally and in the sciences and social sciences.

### **Resources for Academia and Beyond**

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the Vitae Blog are great resources for all sorts of conversations related to academia. Some of the resources are free and some are available via the library or subscription.

Mike Rose, *Back To School: Why Everyone Deserves a Second Chance at Education* illustrates the value of education to everyone.

The book by Toby Miller listed in the works cited, *Blow Up the Humanities*, provides an interesting argument about the need for change in the Humanities. Helen Small's *The Value of the Humanities* is, as the title states, more concerned with discussing and illustrating the value of the Humanities.

### **Resources for Critical Consciousness**

Paulo Freire's classic, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, revolutionizes education and chapter 2 is especially helpful as it explains the difference between the "banking method" of education and education for critical consciousness.

I was reminded of Paul Kivel's *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Social Justice* by my fabulous colleague, Kati Corlew, whose work in psychology and climate change is inspiring. She notes that this book lends itself to "activism and ally training, using history, communications, social sciences, and critical theory."

Cynthia Kaufman's *Ideas for Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change* is exactly as it sounds. It explores ideas—or theories—ranging across culture and politics; capitalism, racism, and gender-based oppression; as well as nature, utopia, and democracy. The last chapter asks the question so many students ask, "Where Are We Going and How Do We Get There?"

adrienne maree brown's book, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, is an excellent example of interdisciplinarity as she calls upon examples from nature that speak to social justice organizing and draws on the wisdom of Octavia E. Butler's speculative fiction as well as brown's activist work.

*Oppositional Consciousness: The Subjective Roots of Social Protest*, edited by Jane Mansbridge and Aldon Morris, is a rich collection of essays that is categorized as political science/sociology, but also considers ideas that cross, and unite, disciplines.

Pretty much anything written by bell hooks is a good source for considering critical consciousness. While a bit dated, Sut Jally's interview with her—*bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation*—is a great resource and includes ideas like that of the “enlightened witness.”

For a challenging but seminal read, Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* is enlightening. She also wrote an article titled “U.S Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World.” Both of these pieces are highly scholarly and revolutionary.

### **Resources for Self-Care and Fitness**

The UMA Nursing program is a great resource for self-care. Every spring they host a self-care fair that includes yoga, Meditation, reiki, aroma therapy, and more. Their program is also cutting edge in its inclusion of interdisciplinary approaches to health and healthcare, integrative healing practices, and the training that recognizes the connection between mind and body. My colleagues, Carey Clark and Lynne King, model interdisciplinary practices in their teaching, writing, and service.

My website [www.cultureandmovement.com](http://www.cultureandmovement.com) provides connections to a variety of feminist fitness resources as well as to my book, *Women and Fitness in American Culture*, an interdisciplinary discussion about fitness in American culture.

Ms. Fit Magazine is an online fitness magazine that offers a feminist fitness approach and it often includes articles about self-care and other important feminist fitness discussions and resources.

The book *The Unapologetic Fat Girl's Guide to Exercise and Other Incendiary Acts*, by Hannah Blanke, offers practical advice for anyone who wants to start being more active and healthy. It also provides a critique of a fitness culture that shuns “fat.”

Resmaa Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, is not only a great resource for understanding trauma; it also offers many practical exercises for addressing the ways in which trauma impacts our minds and bodies. He speaks specifically to race-based trauma in three general groups: white-bodied people, African Americans, and the Police.

Gail Parker's *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-Based Stress and Trauma* is an excellent book that uses yoga as a way to combat the impacts of race-based trauma, but it is also packed with insights into a variety of aspects of yoga. This book also includes some instruction on restorative yoga poses which are a great way to relax and rejuvenate.



Bo Forbes combines yoga, mindfulness, and neuroscience for some interesting food for thought as well as effective methods of self-care. She regularly presents at yoga conferences and trainings and more information can be found on her website [boforbes.com](http://boforbes.com). Her article from Yoga Journal about “The Bliss of Boundaries” provides yoga exercises and other ideas toward creating healthy boundaries.

## Acknowledgements

This book has been on my mind for a long time; it wasn't until after spending a semester doing research and curriculum development (with a "reduced" teaching load) that the ideas began to click into place.

The decision of the UMA colloquium committee to work with the theme of Interdisciplinarity in the 2015-16 academic school year also acted as an impetus, and conversations with my colleagues helped me to expand this work. Some of the resources here come from colleagues' suggestions when we decided our chosen colloquium book was not one we wanted to recommend to the whole campus.

I'd also like to thank my research assistants during the spring 2015 semester—Kendralee Tessier and Lauren Verow—who helped with this project, but also helped to open up some time for me to make room for this project. Thanks also to Tessa Pyles who read a rough draft and gave me more confidence in this project, and to Lisa Botshon for her helpful edits.

Most of all I'd like to thank my students. Their passion for learning and their recognition of the value of interdisciplinary studies, American studies, and women's and gender studies continues to inspire me to do my work. This book is an attempt to help my students—and any other students who might benefit—as they make their way through their education and through their lives.

### *The 2022 Revised Version*

After updating this book a couple of times since I first wrote it and self-published it, I decided I needed to expand it for use in the course. It still needs work, but it is where it is for the fall 2022 semester!

This book draws heavily in places from Repko and Augsburg because I have used both of these textbooks in the past and neither one did exactly what I wanted them to do. I thought: *if only I could bring together the best from both books*. I have attempted to do this, but again, it still needs some more work to be where I want it to be.

© Sarah Hentges, 2015 (revised 2021, 2022)

Please share this book and cite me when you reference it.