

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One planning Template

1. **Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

This proposal draws attention to the Global and Comparative programs and initiatives that WMU excels at but which are not coordinated in a way that facilitates interdisciplinary work. It would serve to merge the following units: World Languages and Literatures, Comparative Religion, Institute for Intercultural and Anthropological Studies, Spanish, and Global and International Studies. This would allow better planning for courses and would align programming within these areas which already share many interests. It would provide a firm foundation in cultural and language competency and critical thinking skills that would be of lasting benefit to our students, that are in high demand by employers, and that would lay the foundation for our students to live rich and fulfilling lives. It would also set the stage for new programming that could strengthen the combined units and attract students. It highlights our passion for WMU's strategic pillar of global engagement as well as other initiatives. It would allow for more streamlined communication and cooperation with HIGE regarding study abroad, grant development and donor development. The new unit would enhance interaction between faculty. Increased interaction within the unit has the potential to increase collaborative research and grant writing.

2. **Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

Impacted units include the following: World Languages and Literatures, Comparative Religion, Institute for Intercultural and Anthropological Studies, Spanish, and Global and International Studies. Multiple meetings were held prior to the Winter break that included chairs and directors from the affected departments as well as faculty. The largest combined meeting had 30 participants from these units. The proposal was also debated within individual departments at their faculty meetings. There was considerable interest in the idea but also new competing proposals developed. This proposal is meant to begin a dialogue that could lead to a new School – if not in this exact form outlined here. Additionally, there may be there are other units or faculty that might eventually be impacted.

3. **Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Initially the new School could work with minimal changes to current offerings but the structure would allow room for future changes. The combination would lead to a decrease in the number of courses as overlapping courses are changed. Other universities which have started roughly similar programs have noted steady and increasing enrollments. The School's focus on bringing greater understand and critical thinking skills to bear on international and comparative issues should be attractive for students looking for careers that take into account diversity and cultural competency. The two major curricular changes under this proposal are the new major (see below) which combines several previous majors to create a core identity for the School, and the revised MA program shown below. In addition to these new/revised programs, many previous majors and minors and graduate programs would continue as before.

New Major - Language and Cultural Studies

A set of core courses would serve as common ground for all tracks. Core courses could be drawn from existing courses that would provide a foundation for students. Eventually, the core courses could be created as team-taught courses to further their interdisciplinary nature. Each track would be 9 CR of core courses and 36 credit hours of track-specific content. Courses within the major could count under multiple tracks. This aids enrollment and assures students across the major meet with and work with students in other tracks.

Tracks:

- a. Spirituality, Religion, and Culture
- b. Culture and Health
- c. Japanese
- d. Chinese
- e. Arabic and Islamic Studies
- f. German
- g. French
- h. World Literature
- i. Linguistics
- j. Latin
- k. Classical Studies

MA – Comparative And Critical Studies

Tracks: World Religion and Culture; Translation Studies; World Languages and Lit; Anthropology

- 4. Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

This combination of units would allow for increased interdisciplinary research projects. As the senate white paper noted this would be most effective if the units were brought together in the same building where regular interaction would facilitate discussion. Faculty offices could be intermixed allowing for more opportunities to talk across and between disciplines and creating a sense of belonging to the larger unit. Grant applications in areas of interest in common would be encouraged (for example in translation studies, health, race and identity).

- 5. Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

Initial cost saving would be in the elimination of some chair and director lines. A unit of this size would need an assistant/associate chair so although 5 units are being combined it would only see a reduction of 3 chair lines. It would also do best if at least 3 of the 5 administrative assistant positions currently in place continued in the new unit. If the units can be physically brought together it could serve to maximize space use, which under the SRM is an additional cost.

- 6. Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

Many of the courses that are taught in these units can be used across tracks and majors. This would allow for streamlining course offerings. The combined units offer a large number of popular WES courses that would ensure a broader impact, attract students, and generate income under the SRM. This should allow for the support of graduate programs and small class sizes where needed.

One of the problems with standard interdisciplinary programs is that they add workload as faculty in different units are asked to teach in yet another program or to team teach (which can be even more work than teaching on one's own). The advantage of the proposed School is that it would be an interdisciplinary powerhouse on its own – bringing together faculty from the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Tracks, majors and minors within the School could adjusted as needed to encourage increased interdisciplinarity without having to add new work on top of old.

The majors and minors list for this combined unit is long. They would not require extra faculty or courses though as they will be able to take advantage of courses that would now count for multiple programs. New innovations, such as interdisciplinary team teaching, would be developed so as to not add to workload but instead to compliment/improve existing courses.

- 7. Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

The initial group working on this proposal met with the founding director of a similar unit at Texas A&M. He noted that one advantage of the new unit at his School was that when they were able to hire new faculty they could focus on truly interdisciplinary hires. Instead of seeking to hire a new professor of German, for example, they could look to hire someone who could teach German but was also a specialist in another area (immigration, policy studies, ethnography, etc.). The proposed School would be perfect for a cluster hire that leveraged common interests in areas such as translation, health, pop culture, and race and identity.

To reiterate what was mentioned above - multiple meetings have been held already to discuss this proposal. The result has been support for this proposal but also the creation of several

similar proposals. It is hoped that this and other proposals will spark a conversation and lead to something new and innovative that helps WMU stand out in a crowded field by highlighting our strengths and finding ways to improve upon them.

8. Contact

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