

## 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 is to form an evaluation institute at WMU that draws on existing strengths in evaluation and creates new learning, research, and service opportunities. The proposal addresses three challenges:

1. How can WMU better convey its evaluation strengths to the world?
2. How can evaluation-related courses be reimagined to reduce redundancy across units and expand offerings to better prepare students to be exceptional evaluation scholars and practitioners?
3. How can we enhance collaboration among the many units and individual faculty and staff that are engaged in evaluation education, scholarship, development, and capacity building?

Below are some of WMU's current strengths in evaluation, which are dispersed across campus:

Various faculty, staff, centers, and institutes conduct evaluations at local, state, national, and international levels in diverse areas such as STEM and higher education, human services, behavioral health, youth development, human performance, food security, public health, and international development. Many engage in research and development to improve evaluation theory, methods, and practice.

Opportunities to learn about evaluation at WMU include certificate, master's, and doctoral programs as well as professional development workshops and webinars.

WMU investigators and units have strong reputations with funding agencies such as the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, State of Michigan.

Established at WMU in 1973, The Evaluation Center is dedicated to advancing the theory, practice, and use of evaluation. The Center conducts externally funded evaluations and research on evaluation; develops and disseminates resources to support the practice and use of evaluation; offers professional development; and hosts the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, which defines standards for program evaluation quality.

- 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?

The proposed institute would serve as the academic home for the existing Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation (IDPE) program, which now resides in the Graduate College. This was a sensible location for IDPE in the past, given that IDPE was jointly offered by the Colleges of Arts & Sciences, Education & Human Development, Engineering & Applied Sciences, and Health & Human Services. The new SRM budget model does not allow for academic programs to reside in service centers like the Graduate College. Creating an evaluation institute would establish a high-profile focal point for evaluation teaching and learning, externally funded projects, and scholarship.

Several units from across campus would make logical partners. It's important that the engagement of these units--such as those listed below--does not threaten their existence, but instead creates opportunities for enhanced collaboration and efficiency. The nature of their involvement would be determined through dialogue and negotiation, then formalized through memoranda of understanding:

The Evaluation Center (Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation)

Science and Math Program Improvement (Mallinson Institute for Science Education, College of Arts & Sciences/College of Education & Human Development)

Evaluation, Measurement, and Research (College of Education & Human Development)

School of Public Affairs and Administration (College of Arts & Sciences)

Human Performance Institute (Department of Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering & Engineering Management, College of Engineering & Applied Sciences)

School of Social Work; Public Health (College of Health & Human Services)

Additionally, it would make sense to explore opportunities for specific faculty members to have joint appointments between the new institute and their home departments.

- 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?

By partnering with departments and programs that possess evaluation strengths and those whose students need evaluation skills, the new evaluation institute can be at the forefront of rethinking academic interdisciplinarity related to evaluation.

Evaluation as a form of inquiry and professional practice is a technical and specialized endeavor requiring much more than subject-matter expertise. Students across the academic spectrum can benefit from courses in evaluation. Faculty affiliated with the new evaluation institute can offer cutting-edge courses in evaluation theory and practice that meet the needs of students from a variety of disciplines: social work, public health, public administration, education, business, sociology, and more. The elevated profile of the institute could compel more WMU

undergraduates to pursue graduate education in evaluation at the University. The institute will work with relevant undergraduate programs to develop pipelines and grow enrollment.

Creating an evaluation institute, anchored by IDPE and other partners mentioned above will increase the visibility of evaluation across campus and allow for programming tailored to meet evaluation education needs and streamline offerings. This alignment and consolidation would both increase course enrollment and reduce duplication.

One strategy for increasing overall enrollment and transforming course delivery is offering synchronous online learning opportunities (including courses and degrees). Increasing remote offerings would also enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion by attracting students who would otherwise be unable to seek a WMU degree (e.g., international students who are unable or unwilling to relocate). In addition, the institute could more effectively leverage expertise across disciplines and facilitate a truly interdisciplinary experience and education.

- 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?

The potential partnering units already engage in externally funded evaluation-related projects. This work ranges from small contracts with local nonprofits to multi-million dollar grant-funded initiatives. As a focal point for these activities, the institute could increase external funding by more efficiently and effectively engaging expertise from the participating units as opposed to the current tendency for funding to be sought only within existing units. Increasingly, multidisciplinary efforts are sought for federal and non-federal grant and contract funded research and evaluation, further buttressing and positioning the rationale for an interdisciplinary institute.

Currently, there are many evaluation-related initiatives around the world that present opportunities for engagement and growth for the discipline and the University. For instance, there is a strong evaluation youth movement (<https://www.evalpartners.org/evalyouth>) that has an appetite for mentoring that is larger than the current volunteers can provide. These young and emerging evaluators are spread across the globe and represent the future of evaluation. An evaluation institute at WMU could leverage the vast expertise of the University to serve such a growing appetite, and in the process expand our reach, deepen our diversity and inclusion commitment, and develop new pipelines for all levels of our programming.

- 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?

The institute would be a University-wide hub for program and policy evaluation (among other types of evaluation-related activities). It would draw from and leverage a vast range of disciplinary, organizational, and contextual evaluation expertise that already exists at WMU. As evaluation is practiced within and across disciplines and continues to experience significant international growth, there is an opportunity to enhance WMU's position as a global thought leader. Simultaneously, increased revenue opportunities could be realized by offering distance education opportunities, for which there is significant demand nationally and internationally. In

the long-term, such an institute would add value through the reduction of course and program duplications, better use of faculty resources, increased enrollment, and external funding.

Although this proposal is not primarily a cost-savings proposal, opportunities for reducing costs and increasing efficiencies may emerge. That largely depends on how the partnering units wish to engage with the institute. Some may see benefits in consolidating administrative functions, facilities, and staff. Agreements and structures would be established that prioritize ensuring the institute's financial stability while elevating the profile of evaluation at WMU.

- 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?

The relocation of the IDPE to an institute creates opportunities to streamline course offerings in evaluation (including related topics such as social justice, data science, decision science) and research methods. The institute would be a central hub for evaluation-specific teaching and research. As such, IDPE faculty expertise would focus on teaching evaluation-specific courses, as opposed to more traditional inquiry-focused courses (with an evaluation lens) that currently represent a large portion of their load. New evaluation courses focused on evaluation theory and practice could be developed to increase the breadth and depth of opportunities to learn about evaluation for students from across the University. This would free up other evaluation scholars to focus more clearly on their domain-specific applications of evaluation.

Given the previously mentioned joint appointment structure that would need to be explored, institute-affiliated faculty would need to receive 'credit' for supporting interdisciplinary evaluation students, whether supervising their field experiences and practicums or serving on their doctoral dissertation committees. Additionally, details regarding joint appointments, revenue allocations, and related matters would need to be specified, negotiated, and formalized through memoranda of understanding.

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

The idea for this proposal emerged from a committee that Dr. Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Dean of the Graduate College, created and charged with recommending a new academic home for the IDPE program. Committee members' conversations with Dean Byrd-Jacobs, Dean Koretsky, and Provost Bott suggested that the idea of an evaluation institute aligned well with the University's interdisciplinarity initiative. This committee, composed of the individuals listed below, supports the idea of enhancing the interdisciplinary nature of the IDPE program and elevating the profile of evaluation at WMU. (However, note that all members have not had the opportunity to review and explicitly endorse this proposal.)

Dr. Lori Wingate (Chair) - Executive Director, The Evaluation Center

Dr. Brooks Applegate - Professor and Director, Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology, Evaluation, Measurement, and Research, College of Education and Human Development

Dr. Chris Coryn - Professor and Director, Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation, Graduate College

Dr. Kieran Fogarty - Professor and Director, Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Ph.D., College of Health and Human Services

Dr. Tycho Fredericks - Professor and Director, Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering and Human Performance Institute, College of Engineering and Applied Sciences

Dr. Michael Harnar - Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation, Graduate College

Dr. David Hartmann - Professor, Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Charles Henderson - Professor and Director, Physics and the Mallinson Institute for Science Education, College of Arts and Sciences

Dr. Daniela Schroeter - Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Programs, School of Public Affairs and Administration; Associate Faculty, Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation

## **8. Contact**

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