

## 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?

In recognition that no one single method or approach is appropriate for addressing the complex questions in a global society, graduate institutions are increasingly working to prepare their students to collaborate across academic disciplines and to work in multidisciplinary teams. According to the Council of Graduate Schools, university leaders attending the annual Global Summit on Graduate Education recommended that graduate institutions “remove obstacles to cross-disciplinary collaborations, value interdisciplinary mentoring in faculty tenure and promotion, and provide opportunities and space for graduate students and faculty to work on interdisciplinary research projects.”

To this end, the Interdisciplinary Studies Doctorate program (ISDD) was created by the Graduate College in 2015. This program offers flexibility to students with interests outside existing academic boundaries and established programs by combining coursework and research in two or more disciplines/programs. While administered by the Graduate College, the ISDD program relies on the faculty and coursework of the academic colleges. Under the new budget model, the ISDD students should be housed in an academic college or colleges. Furthermore, integrating this program into academic units will provide students in the program with a cohort and community.

We propose to advance and strengthen the ISDD program by creating several more defined multidisciplinary tracks while maintaining the option for an individually designed program. Options for tracks might include Sustainability, Social Justice, Climate Change, Science and the Humanities, among others. Faculty will determine the available tracks; students will select a track and primary faculty advisor and will be admitted to the ISDD code for that college(s). This existing doctoral program can be a mechanism to support the interdisciplinary areas identified by faculty interest and expertise through the Interdisciplinarity @ WMU initiative.

- 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?

Graduate College - current home of Interdisciplinary Studies Doctorate program

College of Arts and Sciences and any other interested college

- 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?

The ISDD degree was developed to broaden opportunities for graduate students who wish to pursue an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary program of study that cannot otherwise be accommodated via existing WMU doctoral programs. While there are other interdisciplinary graduate programs at WMU, none of these spans across all disciplines and allows the flexibility afforded by the ISDD. Students who successfully complete the Interdisciplinary Studies PhD program must demonstrate breadth of subject knowledge and familiarity with research design and methodology in 2 or more disciplines. This is a good recruitment tool for students who might otherwise need to look elsewhere to pursue their degree and is a good mechanism for advancing university interdisciplinarity efforts.

Given that this program was designed to be an option only for students whose needs could not be met with more traditional graduate programs, there has been no advertising, marketing, or recruitment efforts associated with the program. Even so, it has clearly been an interesting option for prospective students who are looking for a distinct learning experience using an interdisciplinary approach. In the six years of its existence, the ISDD program has had 15 students enrolled, three of whom have graduated. In addition, the Graduate College has received inquiries from over 100 prospective students. ISDD students have also been diverse, with one third of the enrolled students from underrepresented groups.

Strengthening the ISDD program and integrating it into academic units will provide better structure and stability, leading to more effective recruitment of new students and increased enrollment. Another benefit to the ISDD program is that it serves as a mechanism for offering a doctorate degree within units that do not have their own PhD programs.

- 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 ISDD program requires that graduate students form a dissertation committee that includes faculty from at least two disciplines. This promotes innovative learning and discovery by promoting the formation of multi-disciplinary teams that approach unique, complex questions. The ISDD thus reduces our silos and encourages faculty from different disciplines to work together.

An anticipated outcome of the expansion of the ISDD program is that additional faculty from across the university will participate in student committees and will develop research groups and collaborations that expand current scholarship areas. Interactions among faculty from different disciplines with common interests may lead to submission of proposals to external opportunities. Given the promotion of interdisciplinary approaches by funding agencies, this program can serve to launch new areas of excellence at WMU and increase external research funding.

- 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?

Revision of the ISDD does not require new resources but will require the involvement of faculty in supervision of the student's research and the placement of these students in graduate courses related to the disciplines they have selected. If the program enrollment increases, more faculty time will be needed to supervise additional ISDD graduate students. In the current program, all faculty committee members and their chairs or directors must approve the admission of each student into the program. This is to ensure that faculty engaged in the ISDD program have sufficient time to supervise students and that this time commitment does not negatively impact the priorities and needs of their department or unit.

With increased internal awareness of this program, and especially if the program is advertised externally, we anticipate that the enrollment will grow. This should generate additional tuition and state allocation revenue for the units engaged in the program. Under SRM, it will be critical to develop specific tuition allocation rules to incentivize departmental and faculty participation in the program. For example, the college of the faculty member chairing the dissertation committee could receive the tuition and state allocation funds, or these funds could be split across the units of the dissertation committee.

- 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 ISDD is designed to utilize existing coursework and faculty. The program requires 60 credit hours, with a GPA of 3.25 or better, from at least two disciplines. Coursework consists of a minimum of 32 credit hours of subject knowledge, including at least 2 classes from each of 2 or more disciplines/programs, at least 15 credit hours of training in research methodology, and 12 hours of dissertation credits. The program of study for each student is designed by the student and the dissertation committee, consisting of at least 4 faculty members from at least 2 different disciplines/departments. The program of study, candidacy exam, and research project are supervised by the dissertation committee. The faculty involved ensure that the program is reasonable and can be completed in a realistic timeframe.

The ISDD is currently administered by the Graduate College, which has minimal staffing to contribute to the program at this time. It could instead be overseen by a committee with representation of all participating colleges, e.g. associate deans or selected graduate director representatives, with most of the responsibility for individual students assigned to the doctoral dissertation committee.

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

The current ISDD program is housed in the Graduate College, which is a service unit under the SRM budget model. Since the program relies on faculty and courses in the academic colleges, the tuition and state allocation revenue generated by students in the ISDD program should go to the academic colleges providing the courses and time for student supervision.

Depending on the other ideas generated by the Interdisciplinary @ WMU initiative, the ISDD program may be a useful tool to implement other proposed efforts, given that it is an established doctoral program with a great amount of flexibility.

**8. Contact**

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