

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 recommends moving the Product Design program from the Frostic School of Art into the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation. It would (ideally) be joined by Graphic Design (Frostic School of Art), Interior Design, and Fashion Merchandising and Design (both of the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences). The joined programs would retain their identities, but share a Departmental Policy Statement, tenure and promotion policies, and common Design Foundations, Design History, and Special Topics courses when appropriate. This would allow for interdisciplinary across all levels of the programs' curricula, especially in upper-level industry-sponsored studios. These four design programs are a natural fit together because of their common language, theory, materials and production methods, and design thinking process. This holistic approach to problem solving would be used to tackle traditional design problems such as visual brand language, usability, ergonomics, and color theory, but also complex issues like global warming and gun violence. The resulting curriculum would equip students with deep knowledge of their respective disciplines, but also give them the experience of interdisciplinary collaboration. Moreover, they would have the confidence that their unique approach could be used in nontraditional ways to improve quality of life here and around the globe.

Note: Interior Design is highly interested and motivated to join the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation. However, Fashion Merchandising and Design and Graphic Design have reservations at this time. The Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation is wholly uninterested in forcing anyone into joining RIDI against their will.

- 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 impacted programs would be Product Design and Graphic Design, from the Frostic School of Art in the College of Fine Arts, and Interior Design and Fashion Merchandising and Design, from the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences in the College of Education and Human Development. Product Design and Graphic Design would remain in the College of Fine Arts, while Interior Design and Fashion Merchandising and Design would move to the College of Fine Arts. The Product Design program already has many collaborative partners on campus, as it is a transdisciplinary program that includes courses in Engineering and Entrepreneurship, and community/corporate partners (Eaton, Stryker, Fabri-Kal) who sponsor student research projects. There is still untapped potential with these partners, as they could utilize expertise from the other design disciplines as well. By utilizing all four design disciplines, we would be able to pursue even larger and more impactful projects. It is also believed that this merger

would allow the Richmond Institute of Design + Innovation to pursue corporate partners from outside the geographic region we currently serve.

- 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?

This will significantly benefit the undergraduate education of the Product Design and Graphic Design students because they would be in Design Foundations courses (their current foundations courses are art-based) and Design History courses (currently 3 of their 4 history courses are art-based). They also take a Writing about Art course that would become a Writing about Design course. Interior Design and Fashion Merchandising and Design can best speak to how this would impact their students. All design students would also benefit from having additional design electives outside of their current discipline that would count towards their degree. The Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation already has plans for a Design Thinking minor and continuing education courses (with enrollees from our corporate partners). This merger would make those offerings stronger and attract learners with varied interests. Regarding diversity, currently Product Design only offers one Design History course: 20th Century Design History. With a larger pool of design students, we would be able to offer courses such as African Design history, which in turn might attract underrepresented students to the design disciplines.

- 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?

It is anticipated that the design faculty would have additional opportunities to collaborate with each other, and the synergy and momentum created should make us more attractive partners for campus collaborators and corporate partners. The Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation Industry Advisory Board is aware that a merger is possible and is highly supportive. They already work closely with Product Design students but are excited to work with the other design disciplines in the future. These corporate partners have already committed \$150,000 to industry-sponsored projects over the 3+ years of the Product Design program, so there will be extensive research and fundraising opportunities for Graphic, Interior, and Fashion Merchandising and Design as well. Individual donors and foundational donors have also shown interest in supporting such a merger.

- 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?

This merger would allow the design disciplines to share infrastructure, equipment, marketing expenses, and admissions and recruiting efforts. For example, the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation has an underutilized model shop (Demmer DREAM Lab) that can handle the influx of students. It is not expected that this merger would reduce administrative positions because the Director of the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation is a faculty member and not an administrator. Additional efficiencies will come by sharing a common foundational

design curriculum, which will eliminate redundancies while providing a richer academic experience.

- 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?

It is expected that this initiative could be implemented without the need for additional faculty or staff, beyond what was originally intended for the Product Design program. It would streamline the curricula through Design Foundations and Design History courses. It would also lead to more appropriate and meaningful committee work. The Product Design interdisciplinary course (Product Design 4) is currently under-enrolled, as it is difficult to recruit students from across campus. This would help remedy that situation as well, as we would be able to achieve interdisciplinarity among the design disciplines. As for workload, the Product Design and Graphic Design faculty are tenure-track and expected to conduct research, and this merger could allow for more research opportunities for the Interior Design and Fashion Merchandising and Design faculty, leading to increased research funding and a more sustainable workload.

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

This merger would show a commitment to design excellence not typically seen in our peer institutions. The Product Design faculty and staff are proud of the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary program that was created within the Frostic School of Art, but this merger will create new opportunities for our students and faculty through increased collaboration, renewed focus, engaging projects, and sustainable workload.

One exciting expression of the conjoining of these four areas would come in a Kickstarter curated storefront where students would be able to move from isolated classroom endeavors to products, if not companies, developed out of that work. A secondary consideration would be a physical storefront in Kalamazoo, which would sit alongside a consultancy or “Skunk Works” space meant to engage deeper with our corporate partners in the region, our alumni when they come back to visit, and our community as we work together to “Make Stuff that Matters.”

- 8. Contact**

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