

## 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 CIDA accredited Interior Design program from the Family and Consumer Sciences Department (FCS) into the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation (RIDI). Interior Design by its nature requires knowledge in design, art, science and business. This is also shared by other design disciplines, such as product design, fashion design and graphic design. The common thread is rooted in a human centered approach to problem solving. These disciplines create and collaborate for people from all backgrounds to enhance and solve problems through design. All of these majors exist within the university yet are housed in different colleges. The design programs are a natural fit together because of their common language, theory, materials, production methods, and design thinking process. If they were located together, an interdisciplinary platform would be established in RIDI. These programs would share common Design Foundations and Design History courses, and the students would work in an interdisciplinary manner within industry-sponsored studios when appropriate. This holistic approach to problem solving would be used to tackle design problems such as visual brand language, materiality, ergonomics, and color theory, but also complex issues like global warming and social justice. The resulting curriculum would equip students with deep knowledge of their respective disciplines, and provide an experience of interdisciplinary collaboration. We are entering a new decarbonized age; students need the confidence and interdisciplinary knowledge to seek and solve the unique problems this future brings.

Note: Interior Design believes all design disciplines would benefit from being part of RIDI. However, Fashion Merchandising and Design and Graphic Design have reservations. The Interior Design Program respects the opinions of the instructors in these programs. The share courses with Fashion Merchandising and Design would continue as they are now.

- 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 Interior Design. Interior Design would move from the Department of FCS in the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) to RIDI in the College of Fine Arts. Product Design is currently located the College of Fine Arts, which would also move to RIDI from The Frostic School of Art. The Interior Design program currently requires course within the Haworth School of Business and the Frostic School of Art and shares courses with the Fashion Merchandising and Design program within CEHD. The move to RIDI would support our relationship with the Haworth College of Business and assist us in building community collaborations. These relationships would allow the Interior Design Program to offer more expertise to industry partners and provide students with more diverse

skills for employment. The practice of design is always a collaborative endeavor. Working with a design client is a collaboration of two or more stakeholders. That said, RIDI could not only work within its design majors as interdisciplinary but could and should expand beyond to mimic the nature of practice. This opens a possible cross-disciplinary collaboration with any college within the university to enrich the student understanding of how to analyze and define the design problem, identify potential strategies for solving the problem and to synthesize all into a solution. This does not happen without a collaborative dialogue. 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, bringing heightened awareness and attention to the unique collaborations within RIDI and bringing the university to the larger national design stage.

- 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 Interior Design and Product Design students because they would be in shared Design Foundations courses (one current foundations course is art-based) and Design History courses (one current history course is art-based). All design students would benefit from having additional design electives outside of their current discipline that would count towards their degree. The Interior Design Program already has the option of a minor in Interior Design. Shared foundation courses would make this minor easily achievable by Product Design majors. The Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation already has plans for a Design Thinking minor and continuing education courses (with enrollees from our corporate partners). The plan for a Design Thinking minor is appealing to the Interior Design program as many of our students are interested in larger design issues related to the world, as well as applying design education to a variety of professional formats. Joining forces with the RIDI faculty opens many windows for the future: continuing education for industry partners, and the possibility of a 4+1 degree or a graduate degree. This merger would make those offerings stronger and attract learners with varied interests. Currently, Interior Design offers History of the Built Environment. With a larger pool of design students, we would be able to offer courses such as African Design history, as well as other non-Western or special topic courses, which in turn might attract underrepresented students to the design disciplines. Diversity, equity and inclusion would be met through collaborative endeavors that require input from diverse points of view.

- 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 and the Interior Design Advisory Board are both aware that a merger is possible and are highly supportive. They already work closely with students in their given disciplines but are excited to work with students in other design disciplines as well. The Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation 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 Interior Design. Individual donors and foundational donors have also shown interest in supporting such a merger. The interior design industry offers student design competitions, which are actively pursued by faculty and students. Having a larger pool of students to create design teams would be a very exciting opportunity for the students to differentiate, expand and enhance their educational experiences.

- 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, as well as admissions and recruiting efforts. For example, the Interior Design Program currently needs a makerspace/shop and the Richmond Institute for Design + Innovation has an underutilized model shop (Demmer DREAM Lab) that can handle the influx of students. Using the Demmer DREAM Lab, Interior Design students will be able to produce design prototypes, aiding in greater design communication techniques that also ensures their professional versatility upon graduation; another important quality identified by the Interior Design Advisory Board. This will also enhance their skills and result in a more robust design discovery process. 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?

The Interior Design program has sustained enrollment and has consistently grown in the last few years. The Interior Design Program has been lacking adequate fulltime faculty prior to the retirement of the program's only tenured faculty in September of 2020. This suggested move to RIDI would not change this need for fulltime Faculty. Interior Design and Product Design would streamline the curricula through shared Design Foundations and Design History courses, reducing the teaching load. The one Interior Design faculty on a tenure-track currently has no time for research due to her teaching load, thus this merger would reduce that teaching load allowing for more research time. Research time leads to increased research funding, integration of applied research in the studio classroom, and a more sustainable workload for all faculty. The Interior Design Program curriculum is designed to build from course to course and year to year. This means that the courses are only offered once a year. This curriculum is designed to be achieved in four years of study. Courses in the professional program (the junior and senior level) are capped to a maximum of 18 students as studio based courses cannot achieve the learning outcomes if the class size is increased beyond that number. As the program continues to grow, the need to add additional sections result in a stronger need for more faculty.

**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 Interior Design faculty is proud of the faculty's ability to maintain the programs' CIDA accreditation despite the numerous faculty cuts over the last 10 years. It is time to merge with a like-minded design discipline to share courses, ideas, and resources. This move to RIDI could encourage faculty to reinforce existing collaborations and to build new ones both within the University and beyond. Interior Design as a profession is naturally interdisciplinary. The students in the Interior Design program take courses in the Haworth School of Business and share class with the Fashion Merchandising and Design students; we do not see this changing. We see this merger as an opportunity for our students and faculty to increased collaboration, gain renewed focus, and participate in engaging projects.

One exciting expression of the conjoining of design disciplines would come in a Kickstarter-curated storefront where students can better evolve 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 Places and Stuff that Matter."

By moving to RIDI, the Interior Design Program will be better supported to achieve our mission statement:

"The interior design program at WMU prepares students for professional practice and continuing education through seeking and solving complex design challenges in the built environment. Students strive to redefine the status quo and discover how to enhance the quality of life through design."

**8. Contact**

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