

## 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?  
The WMU Interdisciplinary Consultancy

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The WMU Interdisciplinary Consultancy (IC) brings together WMU's renowned researchers and practitioners across the university to provide leading-edge, evidence-based research, practice and education to help organizations in Michigan address the many challenges with which they are faced in a time of increasing environmental complexity. The IC is a profit center that provides consulting services to WMU's community of for-profit, not-for-profit, military, government, and education organizations. Through the practical application of science, this group accesses and uses theory, knowledge, methods and techniques for specific client-driven problems and purposes.

Most of today's consulting firms are staffed with people with MBAs and/or PHD's in Management and offer a single disciplinary approach to the organizational problem-solving process. Given the environmental entanglement in which today's organizations operate, single discipline, hyper specialization problem-solving approaches limit how problems are disentangled and solutions are explored. What's unique about WMU's Interdisciplinary Consultancy is its capacity to bring together multiple disciplines in efforts to address the challenges faced by organizations in its surrounding community from a "multocular" (many eyes) perspective.

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 IC connects faculty working in units and programs across all academic colleges and units, for example, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Haworth College of Business, the College of Education and Human Development, the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the College of Health and Human Services, The Evaluation Center, and the Center for Sustainable Business to consult with community leaders and managers in Michigan to help them in their efforts to build highly effective organizations. The consulting services offered by the hub will focus on the larger challenges facing today's organizations, for example, work and organization design, diversity, equity and inclusion, climate change, sustainability, digital transformation, organizational agility, organizational development, leadership and change, big data, globalization, and strategy execution. Imagine organizing faculty from psychology, sociology, gender and women's studies and education to address the diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges with which an organization may be struggling. Envision pulling together an interdisciplinary team from public health, computer science, and management to assist with telehealth adoption or cybersecurity issues in a health care

system. Consider engaging our data science, management and engineering faculty to address the “big data” puzzles with which organizations of all types are grappling. There are considerable problems facing organizations in WMU’s local community and throughout Michigan, and the interdisciplinary configurations that could be organized to solve them within WMU are many.

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 IC affects teaching, learning, and curricula across the university in several ways. The consulting projects secured by the IC provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to work with faculty and gain hands-on organizational problem-solving experience. The opportunity to engage in real-world, interdisciplinary learning experiences that emphasize critical thinking and creative problem-solving will train students to be interdisciplinary practitioners who consider multiple perspectives when addressing the problems with which they will be faced when working in organizations. In addition, the IC will provide opportunities for faculty to integrate field experiences into their curricula as the organizational partnerships established by the hub should generate many opportunities for on-site organizational problem-solving. Finally, because of the many relationships the IC will establish and cultivate with organizations in Michigan over time, new audiences for our existing programs will be reached and ideas for professional certification and executive education may arise based on the strategic partnerships developed with organizations and the reappearance of the same problems across several organizations.

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 thrust of the WMU Interdisciplinary Consultancy is the application of science to real-world client-driven problems through the collaboration of colleagues across areas and industries of expertise. The emphasis will be practice, i.e., the use of science to achieve practical results for the IC’s client organizations. However, it is difficult to separate practice from scholarship as it is likely that the consulting projects in which faculty participate will lead to research and publication. Faculty will have opportunities to not only apply their research to real world problems, but to also identify organizational problems in need of research to extend the knowledge base in a particular academic conversation. Interestingly, the IC will provide opportunities for faculty to develop themselves as scholar-practitioners— those who span the boundaries between the world of academia and the world of practice to achieve more authentic outcomes, a desired role among many scholars working at universities. The IC will provide not only a mechanism for faculty development, but also deliver a means through which faculty can get to know one another personally and collaborate across disciplines on real-world problems which can lead to creative scholarship and external 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?

We envision the center as a “revenue generating” initiative rather than a cost savings initiative. The IC will align WMU’s expertise across disciplines to address business needs, serve our communities, create opportunities for faculty and students, and grow revenue streams. The IC will be the initial entry point to the University when an organization has an organizational challenge for which they need help and expertise. IC staff will be able to assess the organization’s need and recruit the appropriate interdisciplinary team to begin the consultation discussion. With a single base of operation, WMU will be able to respond faster and more holistically to our communities’ needs. The business model for the hub could take on different forms. For example, revenue could be generated on a project-by-project basis, or organizations could pay a yearly retainer fee and have immediate access to the IC’s expertise when needed.

It’s important to point out that this type of consulting work is already being done to some extent across the university, but it is scattered. The IC would bring together these independent units and organize them into one entity that would put structure around WMU’s ability to harness expertise from across its range of disciplines to create unique solutions to problems with which organizations in our communities are faced. Faculty will know to go to the IC to get themselves, their programs, their students involved in opportunities; the IC will provide a primary point of contact for organizations to the interdisciplinary expertise of the university. By applying the principles of shared services to the development of the initiative, the IC would eliminate service duplication and silos, reduce delivery costs with shared services, centralize service data and promote efficiency, increase productivity, and drive value creation. Unique solutions created by collaborative work through the IC may spin off into “off the shelf” products that could be marketed more widely and less expensively.

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?

As discussed above, since the initiative is to re-organize units already doing consulting work into a single entity, the initiative would be feasible and sustainable as current resources (staff and facilities) could be re-purposed. We envision the new interdisciplinary teams that are brought together for projects may spin off into new interdisciplinary course offerings in existing academic program areas (benefitting students in real time). Developing a client base through the IC will increase our ability to market academic programs and non-credit professional development opportunities to those organizations. Grants and contracts obtained through the IC to support interdisciplinary projects can result in additional faculty pay, release time, or departmental funds depending on the structure of client agreements.

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

Resources and ideas for additional consideration on structure, format, and connections with existing WMU departments:

<https://www.meccconsulting.com/> (student-run consulting idea)

<http://uccc.uchicago.edu/> (connection to Career and Student Employment Services)

<https://www.academicimpressions.com/how-illinois-state-develops-innovation-consulting-community/> (connection to WMUx/innovation)

8. **Contact**

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