Interdisciplinary Studies at WSU

Report to A2C2 – 11/6/2013
Multidisciplinary Workgroup Task Force
Background

- Multidisciplinary Workgroup Task Force established Spring 2012 semester
- Charge: to investigate multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary programming at WSU
- 5 faculty members and 2 Deans
  - Bill McBreen, Dean, College of Nursing
  - Harold Ornes, past Dean, College of Science and Engineering
  - Tamara Berg, faculty, Women’s and Gender Studies
  - Joan Francioni, faculty, Computer Science
  - Theresa Waterbury, faculty, Educational Leadership
  - Kimberlee Snyder, faculty, Business Administration
  - Lynn Ornes, past faculty, Nursing
Definition

- “Interdisciplinary studies” encompasses scholarship and pedagogy engaged in work at the edges of traditional disciplines but where some level of integration among different disciplines is involved.
Benefit of Interdisciplinary Studies

[From 2011 AAC&U Report What Works in Facilitating Interdisciplinary Learning] As the result of intentional interdisciplinary learning experiences, students will be able to:

- Recognize disciplinary strengths, processes, limitations, and perspectives.
- Purposefully connect and integrate knowledge across disciplinary boundaries, in the context of novel situations.
- Be agile, flexible, reflective thinkers who are comfortable with complexity and uncertainty, and can apply their knowledge to respond appropriately and positively.
- Understand that other factors—cultural, political, ethical, historical, and economic—must be considered when addressing the complex problems of this century.
- Understand the universal nature and deep structure of science, as well as the relationship of STEM disciplines to other disciplines.
- Prepare for future learning as lifelong learners in their careers and as citizens.
- Apply their capacity as integrative thinkers to solve problems in ethically and socially responsible ways.
- Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively with others within diverse cultures and communities.
Existing WSU Programs

- **Stand-alone programs**
  - HLA – Health Leadership Administration
  - PSM – Professional Science Masters

- **Theme-based programs**
  - CAST – Child Advocacy Studies Training
  - WAGS – Women’s and Gender Studies
  - Sustainability minor
  - Gerontology

- **Problem-based components**
  - i-Courses (Fa12-Sp13 pilot as part of Next Chapter program)
  - Imagine Cup
  - Informal collaborations among faculty/student groups
Existing Supportive Strategies and Resources

- Internal grant programs to explore new ideas and promote faculty-development opportunities.
- Collaboration and buy-in across departments and colleges that was supported by Deans in the past (including funding, reassigned time).
- Colleagues working on their own across departments.
- Having connections both on campus and in the community.
- Having outside funding.
Challenges for New Programs/ Initiatives

1. No defined mechanism for oversight of interdisciplinary curriculum and/or courses, including but not limited to

   - Responsibility for determining stakeholders and their interests
   - Faculty rosters
   - Ensuring integrity of ongoing curriculum and/or courses
Challenges (cont)

2. No defined mechanism for fostering innovation involving multiple disciplines, including but not limited to

- Funding levels and support
- Structure for decisions on which programs to support
- Accountability of developing programs
- Support for faculty to participate
- Protection of existing departments
  - replacement of reassigned faculty for departmental courses
  - institutional scans and workload credit apportioned fairly
Challenges (cont)

3. No defined mechanism for faculty in different disciplines to collaborate together in the development and delivery of new curriculum and/or courses, which leads to problems around

- Lack of trust in colleagues and WSU administration
- Communication problems within and across units
- Intellectual property questions
Solutions Needed That Will

• Support developing programs and initiatives
• Foster new avenues for interdisciplinary innovation
• Work with and not in competition with existing Academic Units

• Specifically, need strategies and infrastructure to
  1. Support innovative program and component experimentation and development
  2. Support collaboration across disciplinary programs
  3. Provide continued support for permanent programs
  4. Define incentives and expected responsibilities for faculty supported for innovation projects
Questions to A2C2

1. What are issues you are seeing related to
   a. existing interdisciplinary programs and/or courses?
   b. to new programs and/or courses?

2. What are ideas you have for better supporting interdisciplinary programs and/or courses at WSU?