ASSOCIATION FOR INTEGRATIVE STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

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Relying on the kindness of strangers:

CEDD's report on hiring, tenure, promotion in IDS

Review of *Interdisciplinary Hiring, Tenure and Promotion: Guidance for Individuals and Institutions.* Stephanie Pfirman, Paula Martin, Len Berry, Madilyn Fletcher, Monty Hempel, Randy Southard, Dan Hornbach, & Barbara Morehouse. 2007. Council of Environmental Deans and Directors, http://www.ncseonline.org/CEDD/cms.cfm?id=2042.

Reviewed by Richard Carp, Professor and Chair, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.

The status of interdisciplinary studies in American higher education is a conundrum. On the one hand, the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity is ubiquitous (Henry, 2005; Trower, 2008; Kleinberg, 2008). On the other hand, many of the longest standing and most highly regarded undergraduate interdisciplinary units are experiencing "reduced budgets … dispersal of their programs … absorption into existing honors college programs … potential closure … (and) total elimination" (Henry, 2005). To the extent that interdisciplinary programs are thriving, it may be at the price of a "Faustian bargain" with the new "university-as-service-industry," becoming niche markets "not substantially different from the academic (units) they were originally designed to challenge" (Kleinberg, 2008, p. 6). The success of interdisciplinarity and "the end of real interdisciplinarity" could be indistinguishable (Kleinberg, 2008, p. 6). In this unsettled and unsettling context, questions of hiring, promotion, and tenure of interdisciplinarians assume a high priority, since tenure provides the closest thing to job security available in the academy (Augsburg, 2006, p. 151, Note 1, p. 157), and tenure is the coin of the academic realm, signaling institutional commitment and collegial status.

One can only welcome, then, the 2007 report by the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors, *Interdisciplinary Hiring, Tenure and Promotion: Guidance for Individuals and Institutions* (henceforth *Guidance*, Pfirman, et al., 2007). Based on earlier work by one of the authors and three other collaborators (Pfirman, et al., 2005), *Guidance* claims to present "the first comprehensive approach that deals with the entire pre- and post-tenure experience." It offers "guidance … targeted towards both individuals and academic administrators with the goal of facilitating the development and advancement of interdisciplinary scholars" (hereafter IDS, p. 1). *Guidance* self-consciously conflates inter-, multi-, and transdisciplinarity—"scholarship that does not fit within disciplinary structures" (p. 6). It is intended to serve not only environmental sciences/studies, but also "other interdisciplinary fields—for example, women's and urban studies" (p. i). *Guidance* does not consider programs that promote interdisciplinarity per se. It may, therefore, be less helpful to those programs than to inter (or pseudo) disciplines. It is neither sufficient nor useless in either case.

Guidance is a well-considered document with good intentions toward interdisciplinary scholars, and it contains valuable advice. However careful readers will at once have noticed that the two groups at which it is aimed ("individuals and academic administrators") do not include that powerful third group, peer academics—most often senior peers—

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who play the most consequential role in faculty personnel processes.

Cathy Trower, Research Associate at Harvard's Collaborative on Careers in Higher Education, recently likened interdisciplinary faculty seeking tenure to Alice in Wonderland (2008). Although Trower's Alice fails to get tenure, Lewis Carroll's Alice awakens from her dream unscathed. A better literary analogy is Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for interdisciplinary scholars must rely on the kindness of strangers, symbolized in the first instance by those senior peers strangely absent from the intended audience of *Guidance.* Readers may recall Blanche was eventually raped by her sister Stella's husband and driven mad by Stella's inability to accept Blanche's account of the rape (1947).

What is in *Guidance*
(with light editorial commentary)

Guidance divides the academic career into six stages from defining the position to senior faculty status, each with a corresponding section in the report. *Guidance* also includes an "Executive Summary," "Readings," "Resources and Sample Language," and four appendices.

Stage one, "structural considerations," first admonishes that "the first stage … should occur before the scholar is hired" (p. 1). After commenting that "promoting interdisciplinary work requires consideration of disciplinary and departmental structures and cultures," *Guidance* states that disciplinary-based procedures and criteria for tenure and promotion are "manifestly inequitable" when applied to interdisciplinary scholarship (p. 6). Commendably, *Guidance* advises institutions to be self-conscious and proactive, addressing six questions before drafting a search protocol or job description: long-term resource commitment; appropriate expectations for IDS; analyzing promotion and tenure at all levels for impediments; exploring research that indicates women and minorities are especially drawn to interdisciplinary scholarship (e.g., Rhoten & Pfirman, 2007); establishing high-level structures to "oversee and champion interdisciplinary activities"; and showcasing interdisciplinary accomplishments to the campus community (p. 7). These steps can work to clarify the institutional context in which an interdisciplinary hire will take place and may ameliorate aspects detrimental to the success of IDS. However, none transform Blanche's fundamental situation: they can be implemented by administrative fiat, and they can be reversed by that same fiat. IDS remain dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Stage two is establishing the position. There are two primary recommendations. First, involve as early as possible those institutional components that will be crucial to the ongoing success of the person hired. These components may include "disciplinary faculty, interdisciplinary faculty and research scientists, senior academic administrators, and representatives of promotion and tenure committees [along with] institutes or centers devoted to fostering interdisciplinary activities" (p. 10). Second, draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) "that actually articulates expectations about scholarship, teaching, budget, space, and departmental and community participation" (p. 10).

Guidance insists that tenure and promotion criteria be clearly articulated (Appendix I is a sample MOU). Anticipating several well-known obstacles to successful interdisciplinary hires, *Guidance* focuses on the complexity of joint hires and the difficulty of joint appointments at the junior level. The authors recommend that such appointments be 60% to 70% in one "home" department, and that service and budgetary issues be specified in the MOU. The University of Southern California Joint Appointment Checklist (Appendix III) stipulates that the primary department handles tenure, promotion, and merit "by regular procedures followed within that unit" (pp. 28-29). *Guidance* advises that advertising copy clearly articulate the institutional home and all requirements (p. 11). The primary suggestion for fostering institutional acceptance is to develop and search simultaneously for a cluster of several positions in support of an interdisciplinary focus, with search committees constituted from multiple possible home departments. The recommended candidate for each position would negotiate with their home department. The hope is to "set the stage for broad scale acceptance of the concept, and the notion that the success of the initiative or cluster is the objective, rather than the success of an individual department" (p. 11).

In their discussion of stage two, the authors correctly identify many of the obstacles to success for interdisciplinary hires that emerge during the process of position definition and search. Simply put these are: who is the boss; what are the criteria of success and who applies them; when and to whom can Blanche say "no"; and who provides the resources and on what terms. The major recommendation is the MOU, and it is undoubtedly a good idea, for it is intended to answer to these questions. The answers provided, though, are less than satisfactory. In Appendix III the boss is a disciplinary home department (with bigger bosses up the line—Dean, Provost). Blanche can say "no" to the secondary department sometimes (but it provides input on key personnel matters, so "no" may be risky), and the home department provides the resources supported by the Dean.

A key innovation is for the MOU to specify criteria for tenure and promotion, but when push comes to

shove, can this agreement be made to stick? Can a department and/or Dean or Provost be forced to accept a tenure or promotion based on these criteria? The answer is a clear "no." Courts have been loath to address the application of criteria, except when discrimination against a protected class is alleged. In general, courts have restricted themselves to deciding whether or not colleges and universities have followed their established procedures, leaving criteria and their application to locally empowered academic bodies (IceMiller, LLP, Oct. 7, 2007; *Claggett vs. Wake Forest University*, North Carolina Court of Appeals, 1997). Under these circumstances, the MOU is best described in the same language *Guidance* uses for cluster hires. It is a "strategy… to set the stage … for acceptance," but there is no guarantee it will be effective or, if it is, for how long.

Phase two of *Guidance* can help an institution become aware of internal obstacles to success and provide interested and supportive parties useful methods for overcoming them. Where there is general institutional commitment to an interdisciplinary hire, *Guidance* can help supporters overcome resistance, and to this extent it is genuinely helpful. However, "general institutional commitment" remains necessary, and Blanche remains dependent on the kindness of strangers. These strangers are not just academic others—faculty members, deans, provosts—who are unfamiliar with interdisciplinarity in general and with the particular interdisciplinary nexus of the scholar—but in all probability literal strangers as well. The average tenure of Deans and Provosts is about five years, while the tenure clock runs for six; departmental faculties change over time and membership on personnel committees varies annually. The odds are that the people who will ultimately decide promotion and tenure were not involved in the hiring process, may well not have been at the institution at the time of hire, and are likely to have their own agendas. As we will see below, the history of interdisciplinarity suggests that establishing independent interdisciplinary units also may not guarantee long-term security.

Stage three is search and hiring. The main recommendation is to further specify the details of the MOU. *Guidance* advises that the search committee be interdisciplinary and multi-departmental, reflecting the nature of the person sought and possible institutional homes for the position. Because this will result in a committee whose members are not accustomed to working together, and who may not understand key differences between their disciplines or between those disciplines and the interdisciplinary focus of the search, *Guidance* suggests educating search committee members about some key differences between interdisciplinary and disciplinary searches (p. 12).

Regarding the MOU, *Guidance* recommends the committee begin to fill in the blanks left in stage two, spelling out "issues such as research, teaching, service, and mentoring obligations for all departments" (p. 12). Where there will be multiple constituencies, voting responsibility should be specified, and department chairs should be helped to understand that "what works within the discipline, for example, a reliance on informal mentoring, may not work for those who are bridging disciplines and departments" (p. 12).

Getting to the heart of the matter, *Guidance* suggests the MOU specify "departmental representation on review committees, including the tenure process, as well as the criteria … and the terms and conditions for success … (including) the balance of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and publication … and criteria for judging the acceptability of (interdisciplinary) journals" (pp. 12-13). In the context of a supportive institutional environment where success of the appointment is desired, such an MOU will go far to assure the balance of rigor and fairness requisite for all academic personnel evaluations. That is, so long as the strangers are kind, the MOU will help them do their jobs well, and this is a significant advance.

In stage four—development, mentoring, and protection of junior scholars—the mood of *Guidance* becomes increasingly subjunctive. While in stages two and three the MOU was supposed to specify and articulate in writing criteria for success, in stage four there is clear recognition it may not have done so. For example, "junior interdisciplinary scholars housed in a disciplinary department are often caught between … promotion and tenure processes that require demonstration of sufficiently high levels of productivity … in the discipline (and) the desire to devote considerable energy and resources … on interdisciplinary work … distant from the home discipline" (p. 15). If the MOU had successfully and enforceably established the mix of disciplinary and interdisciplinary work and the appropriate venues for each, this would no longer be an issue in stage four. We would simply advise Blanche, "be sure you satisfy the criteria and publish in the venues established in the MOU." Yet *Guidance* correctly recognizes the *realpolitik* of this vulnerable stage of the personnel process, and the MOU is never mentioned.

In order to successfully navigate this stage, employees require help from others they cannot compel. For example, in collaborative work, junior scholars "need to make clear their unique contributions" to satisfy evaluative concerns about their originality and productivity by publishing "some of the research as a senior author." "Senior PI's" of these projects "should be advised to make sure that junior researchers have this opportunity … (and) should clarify the role of their junior colleagues (in) letters of support" (p. 15). Indeed, they should be so kind.

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The discussion of stage four claims to identify inherent differences between interdisciplinary and disciplinary work. Interdisciplinary scholarship is often collaborative and may require time intensive and difficult networking, often at multiple institutions requiring expensive and time-consuming travel. In many arenas, interdisciplinary work is often "applied," rather than "pure" and involves "unusual stakeholders, outside the academy" (p. 14). Because of the intrinsic difficulties of integrating disparate fields, whether collaboratively or individually, and the relative paucity of funding for interdisciplinary work, "interdisciplinary research projects frequently take a long time to get established and produce results" (p. 15). The more radically interdisciplinary the project, the more daunting its prospects: "research that cuts across biophysical and social sciences can be difficult to publish in widely recognized journals," (p. 15) while publication opportunities that do exist are often not indexed in Web of Science, making them more difficult for other scholars to find and less likely to be cited.

Guidance suggests ways to help. Junior scholars can be supported to bring visiting interdisciplinary scholars to campus, thereby educating others on the larger field in which the scholar works and bringing a possible mentor to campus. Interdisciplinary teaching "should be explicitly supported" and departments "should" recognize the difficulties involved in interdisciplinary teaching, including developing new courses for which there are no textbooks and team teaching (p. 16). *Guidance* recommends a senior mentor experienced in interdisciplinary research but warns of the need for clarity about the mentor's role, if any, in evaluation. More strangers (senior PI's, senior mentors, collaborators in other disciplines and institutions)! More kindnesses needed (you have to understand how hard this is, how different from disciplinary work, how slow to develop, how hard to fund)! Poor Blanche.

With stage five, we arrive at formal and consequential personnel evaluations. This section builds on what has come before, remaining in the subjunctive mood. At this point, it's pretty much up to Blanche; the advice might be called "how to get strangers to be kind." Once more the MOU makes no appearance except to be sent to external reviewers, despite its featured role in stages one, two, and three. Three primary arenas are identified: creating the dossier, addressing evaluation criteria, and forming and educating the review committee and external references. Again the advice is helpful if Blanche is among kind strangers. The dossier should be annotated so readers understand the significance of its components (Appendix II is a helpful annotation guide). Colleagues and administrators should be informed in advance that reviews of interdisciplinarians customarily raise questions that do not arise in disciplinary reviews, questions that "do not reflect any potential deficiencies of the individual candidate" (p. 18). *Guidance* urges reviewers "to shift the emphasis … towards intellectual achievement and leadership, rather than traditional metrics" (p. 19), noting that interdisciplinarians tend toward scholarship of "integration," "application," and "teaching" as well as discovery (Boyer, 1990) and restating the aforementioned conditions that may restrict publication of even the finest interdisciplinary work.

Review committees should be interdisciplinary or at least multi-departmental, should include at least one senior interdisciplinarian familiar with Blanche's work, or at least an interdisciplinarian in another field; ideally they would be continuous with search committees. Review committees should "bring in an external reviewer who is familiar with the state of the interdisciplinary field and the candidate's scholarship," or, barring that, "call outside scholars to get their feedback informally" (p. 19). External reviews should be sought from interdisciplinarians in the field and "eminent disciplinary scholars" competent to address the research (p. 19). The MOU should be sent to the external reviewers, who should be asked to "comment on interdisciplinary contributions and impact" (p. 20).

Stage six addresses senior career development. First, *Guidance* notes that senior scholars who move toward interdisciplinarity in mid-career, often after achieving tenure, face the same difficulties as junior interdisciplinarians, difficulties that "must be addressed through improved assessment and reward policies for all scholars" (p. 21). Second, it identifies career-long interdisciplinarians, who need "appropriate assessment during annual reviews and post-tenure review … that account for the special qualities of interdisciplinary activities" (p. 21). *Guidance* recommends supportive mid-career steps (including what it calls, without elaboration, "cross-fertilization of ideas") for senior interdisciplinarians who "become stale and lose momentum with age" (p. 21). Third, it remarks that many senior interdisciplinarians come to the academy from non-academic venues, and that it is necessary to recognize and reward non-academic aspects of their portfolios, particularly when they have affected major policy actions or had "substantial societal impact" (p. 21). Finally *Guidance* observes that some senior scholars are appropriate to lead interdisciplinary programs and that, like other senior scholars, they may require training in and support for leadership activities. They exhort upper administration to "be attuned to the atypical complexities of administering an interdisciplinary faculty, program, and infrastructure," which they identify as "high networking time and costs and lack of recognition," the tendency to do more committee and

advising work than disciplinary peers, "difficulty obtaining awards and salary increases compared to disciplinary scholars," and the "tendency to receive fewer outside offers" (p. 22). Policy recommendations are to give "full credit" for interdisciplinary work, to establish "special awards and resources that reward interdisciplinary activities," and to create a high-level, university-wide administrative leader for interdisciplinary initiatives (p. 22). By the time Blanche reaches middle age her charms have faded, though she may have acquired the wisdom of experience; she must hope those around her value her enough to be kind.

Critique

There is much to like about *Guidance*. Above all, it collects in one place considerations of the life cycle of an interdisciplinary academic position, articulates obstacles to the success of IDS at each stage, and proposes responses to overcome them. If many institutional players genuinely seek the successful appointment of IDS, but others do not, or if all players are supportive but are ignorant of the difficulties, *Guidance* is likely to be quite helpful.

That it does not tell Blanche how to do without the kindness of strangers can hardly be held against it, for it seems there is no other way. The contemporary academy is characterized by disciplinarity, not simply as an organization of knowledge, but much more powerfully as "*political institutions* that demarcate areas of academic territory, allocate privilege and responsibilities of expertise, and structure claims on resources" (Lenoir, 1993, p. 82, italics original). Acting as an interrelated set of political agents, disciplines produce "disciplinary hegemony" which powerfully resists developments that unsettle the primacy and authority of disciplines, sometimes by co-opting components of interdisciplinarity up to and including the label "interdisciplinarity" (Henry, 2005, pp. 17-27). However, the usefulness of *Guidance* is undermined by its disregard of these facts. With high institutional goodwill, interdisciplinary hires are likely to succeed; without such goodwill, *Guidance* provides few effective means to prosper.

Guidance also suffers from two weaknesses: unsupported claims and a subdued whininess. The two are related. *Guidance* frequently asserts the special difficulty of interdisciplinary work: it takes more time, is harder to fund, creates extra teaching demands; networking requirements create extra costs; it is slower to produce results; and so forth. Each claim is plausible and is often supported by plausibility arguments, but nowhere are data provided either directly or by citing sources that provide data.

This goes hand in glove with the sly whininess. On nearly every page we are told that interdisciplinarity is harder than disciplinarity (intrinsically, not because of irrational impediments), so interdisciplinary scholars need a break. Perhaps interdisciplinary work is more difficult, perhaps not—it's no picnic being in a discipline either. After 24 years of academic administration, some in disciplinary and some in interdisciplinary contexts, it seems to me that every segment of the academy believes that its work is the most difficult and time consuming, and that others just don't understand. After being responsible for evaluating work from agroecology to fine art, from education to history, from theory to community-based activism, I am convinced that most scholars in the academy work pretty damned hard, and we'd all be better off appreciating the efforts of others, rather than complaining that we are uniquely overworked and misunderstood.

In this respect I agree with Augsburg (2006) who basically says, "if you want to thrive in your institution, figure out how it evaluates faculty and meet the criteria." For example, *Guidance* recommends the MOU specify teaching obligations so an interdisciplinarian need not teach "department introductory courses for which (s)he is unprepared to teach" (p. 11). Introductory courses are likely to be part of what faculty consider to be the "drudge" of their jobs. Were an interdisciplinary hire to claim exemption from this work, especially by acknowledging inability to teach an introductory course in the home department, the result would likely be damaging ill will. Junior faculty members, disciplinary or interdisciplinary, must figure out how to make key contributions to their home units in terms the units value: sharing unpopular or difficult teaching obligations, bringing in external funds, publishing in respected venues, pleasing the Dean, and so forth. Any argument about intrinsic extra difficulty should be fact- and research-based, and the research must demonstrate that important and widely recognized results were eventually realized.

There are some opportunity costs in being able to do interdisciplinary work. Scholars are well advised to be aware of them and prepared to undertake them, rather than complain about them. In my own career, I have taken care to participate in disciplinary, as well as interdisciplinary, professional organizations and to publish in more than one disciplinary context as well as in interdisciplinary venues. As a mentor I have advised junior colleagues to do likewise. This means spending extra time and money to participate in meetings without reimbursement and finding ways to cast one's work within relevant disciplinary frameworks. But when evaluation time rolls around, evident standing in multiple disciplines gives warrant to claims about the rigor of even radically interdisciplinary work. If some interdisciplinarity requires lack of competence in any discipline,

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that must be demonstrated not merely asserted.

Further Reflections

In 2005, Klein posited "adequate economic and symbolic capital," "full-time appointments in an interdisciplinary (unit)," "a secure location in the organizational hierarchy of the campus," and "control of staffing" as necessary to sustain substantive interdisciplinary work (p. 78). This normalization at the institutional level roughly corresponds to Repko's recommendations for "disciplining interdisciplinarity" through textbooks and other means at the pedagogical level (2006). At the 2003 AIS conference, I worried that seeking and obtaining these institutional goods could amount to Kleinberg's (2008) "Faustian bargain," in which "interdisciplinarity" becomes one among other practices enmeshed in the academy, gaining institutional support and garnering control over resources (space, tenure lines, operating budgets, and status) by joining disciplinary hegemony but losing value as something other than disciplinarity.

Developments since 2003 raise concerns even about the effectiveness of normalization. Recent years have shown devastating losses to long-established and well-reputed programs that had apparently achieved all of Klein's benchmarks. This includes the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Appalachian State University, where I have been chair for nine years, which has lost control of tenure (dispersed to disciplinary departments) and become a program. Similarly damaging fates have come to units at George Mason, Alabama-Tuscaloosa, Wayne State, Miami University of Ohio, Arizona International, and San Francisco State. It seems increasingly likely that normalization can only take place in the presence of what I have called "kind strangers," and that new strangers, or circumstances that try the kindness of old ones, is sufficient to eradicate Klein's benchmarks of success. At Appalachian, we used the whole panoply of discipline-like normalized forms developed through AIS and elsewhere and recommended by Szostak (2006), Repko (2006), Augsburg (2006), and others: professional association; journals; assessment protocols; textbooks; similar programs at other institutions. They were useless, and seem to have been equally so at other institutions. Responses at Appalachian were alternately, "So what," and "I don't care." We are all, truly Blanche DuBois.

At our 2007 conference my thoughts had developed, partly because of these profound losses to the field. These came about, I proposed, not because interdisciplinarians have not yet won the battle of normalization, but because interdisciplinarity is a conundrum which contradicts the logic of the department and college structure that organizes knowledge production on campus and may not be normalizable.

Interdisciplinarity is as old as disciplinarity, yet it has been persistently institutionally ephemeral. This is at least partly because interdisciplinarity per se has no object. The conceit of disciplines is that they study some *thing*: matter in its chemical interactions (Chemistry); human minds (Psychology); how to get people to buy (Marketing). Interdisciplinarity per se studies no thing in particular, although each interdisciplinarian or interdisciplinary team studies something. Interdisciplinarity involves an always-developing ensemble of practices for marshaling and integrating knowledge from multiple sources on behalf of a complex and evolving understanding of the world. It insists on the transdisciplinarity of the world, which, as we live in it, requires such an ensemble of practices.

The unease expressed in *Guidance* about IDS in Environmental Studies indicates that things may not be so different among the "inter (or pseudo) disciplines," which appear to have knowledge objects. Augsburg suggests we "look at other successful longstanding interdisciplinary programs such as women's studies" because "they at least usually offer tenure-lines" (2006, p. 154). However, Women's Studies persists largely because of political factors few other units can muster (not even Black/African/Africana Studies or Latino/Chicano Studies).

Moreover, the normalization of Women's Studies has come at the cost of intelligibility and relevance to women outside academe (Messer-Davidow, 2002). Messer-Davidow recounts how the "object" of Women's Studies ("woman") has itself been transformed as the result and condition of successful normalization. (See Henry, 2005, pp. 20-27.)

In the light of current disruptions of long-standing interdisciplinary programs, and of *Guidance's* tacit acknowledgement of continued reliance on the kindness of strangers, even apparently established interdisciplinary programs should anticipate periodic disruptions. These disruptions may necessitate insurgent practices, even for those who prefer normalization. Anticipating disruption, we might think of the virtues of dispersed (or guerilla) organizational models, whose weaknesses we know only too well. Unlike Szostak (2006, p. 147), for example, I recommend seeking tenure in disciplinary departments to avoid the possibility of dismissal if a tenure-holding interdisciplinary unit is disbanded. Understanding that we contradict the organizational logic of the academy, we should use whatever resources we can get without identifying success with particular resources, any of which can be lost to unkind strangers. Indeed, some academic losses may be gains when viewed in a larger context. While Trower (2008) worries that

interdisciplinarians are "being forced" to work in non-academic laboratories, as early as 1984 Whitley wrote that such laboratories "have clearly demonstrated the contingent nature of the academic role for scientific work and broken the universities' monopoly of knowledge production" (p. 19).

Even in the academy, we shouldn't worry about the resilience of interdisciplinarity, though we may well worry about the security of our jobs and of those who succeed us. Like many insurgent phenomena (weeds for example), interdisciplinarity is irrepressible, for at least three reasons. First, disciplinary knowledge cries out for integration; powerful as they are, the disciplines' lack of practices engendering "the pattern that connects" (Bateson, 1979) gives rise to interdisciplinarity. Second, scholars pursue questions, not disciplines, and in following them often discover new, unfamiliar knowledge needs that lead them to interdisciplinary integration. Third, the world is in fact transdisciplinary, compelling us to "marshal and integrate knowledge from multiple sources on behalf of a complex and evolving understanding."

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AIS website has new look

If you have visited the AIS website, www.muohio.edu/ais, recently, you should have noticed a significant difference.

The homepage now opens with a colorful vista and animation, which draws a visitor's eye to the banner heading, "Interdisciplinary Studies," making clear the mission of the Association for Integrative Studies. The Association's mission is more fully described in an opening copy block on the homepage with a link to more information inside, while a second copy block has a link to the website for the 30th Annual Conference at Springfield, Illinois, in October. Horizontal and vertical navigation bars link the user to other sections of AIS website.

The redesigned website also introduces a new logo with sleek contemporary lines, replacing the former "jigsaw puzzle" logo. Members will see the new logo in other AIS publications as well, such as the *AIS Newsletter*.

For the past couple of years the AIS Board of Directors has been considering major changes for the decade-old website. User-friendly features, a more striking design, and additional resources were among items on the wish list. In April, users had the opportunity to witness the fruition of these discussions when AIS launched its redesigned website.

Members should find all the resources that were present on the previous website: information about AIS, its organization, and its membership; resources such as the doctoral program directory and sample syllabi, past editions of the *AIS Newsletter* and *Issues in Integrative Studies*, a listing of consultants, job postings, and the

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Interdisciplinary Community Development:
Using integrative approaches to address societal challenges

Review of *Interdisciplinary Community Development*. Alice K. Johnson Butterfield & Yossi Korazim-Körösy, Eds. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, xix, 255 pp. Paperback, $45. (ISBN: 978-0-7890-3294-2)

Reviewed by Rick Szostak, Professor, Economics Department, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Readers of this newsletter will find this book of interest for a variety of reasons. First, one of the main motives for interdisciplinary teaching and research is the appreciation that societal problems do not come in neat disciplinary bundles, but rather require interdisciplinary understanding. This book takes this point of view as its starting point, and asks how an interdisciplinary approach has and can support community efforts to tackle a wide range of societal challenges.

Second, this book talks a great deal about how the academic understandings of social scientists and humanists can be integrated with the professional insights of social workers and other professions. This link between the human sciences and professionals is of great interest to the AIS. Professional training is generally interdisciplinary, but often not self-consciously so, and one of the thrusts of the discourse on interdisciplinary theory and practice is and should be a discussion of how professional training could be improved by interrogating the nature of interdisciplinarity itself.

Third, the book at several points notes that the challenges of integrating across disciplines are in many ways similar to the challenges of integrating the understandings of academics and professionals with those of community members and activists. In both cases, one needs to bridge different conversations, establish a common vocabulary, seek to appreciate the worldview of others, and work collectively toward a holistic and nuanced understanding. There is thus a symbiosis between the two key elements of "interdisciplinary community development," for the attitudes conducive to interdisciplinarity are likewise conducive to a constructive interaction with community members, and these two sorts of constructive dialogue are jointly critical for the development of superior community practices and policies.

This argument has been at the center of the European discourse on transdisciplinarity. In North America, Julie Klein and Bill Newell have been among those who have noted the similarity between these two types of integration. This book allows us to see in action the symbiosis between the two types of integration.

Fourth, AIS members will be interested to learn that this book is not an isolated publication but one key outcome of a growing interdisciplinary and international collaboration. The author of this review should confess that he has met one of the co-editors (Yossi) and three of the co-authors of one of the chapters at an international conference, and is personally aware of the ongoing efforts to organize conferences and conference sessions around interdisciplinary community development. This ongoing conversation intersects with the AIS conversation in many ways, and AIS members will find this book a useful entry point. The two nodal points of this conversation are the United States and Israel, but this book signals the international collaboration at the heart of the project in including chapters from authors in India, Croatia, and Romania, and other chapters involving collaborations between scholars in Canada or the United States with others in Nigeria, Central America, or the Middle East.

So what is interdisciplinarity community development? The editors are well aware that the word "community" gets thrown around a lot in both scholarly and popular literatures and is only rarely carefully defined. For the purposes of this book, a community is a group of people that (should/could) consciously share some purpose(s) or problem(s). While the communities addressed tend to be geographical communities, communities of interest or identity could also be served. Community development involves strengthening civil society (through strengthening both links within the community and its interaction with sources of academic and professional advice) in order to prioritize the actions and perspectives of these communities in addressing the development of social/economic/environmental policies. It thus involves empowerment: strengthening the capacity of both individuals and community-level institutions. And it supports an active democratic life. It is guided by a respect for human dignity, diversity, and inclusiveness.

What of interdisciplinarity? The editors fully appreciate that this is quite different from multidisciplinarity. They recognize that interdisciplinarity involves achieving synergies across disciplinary insights while respecting the values of other disciplines. As noted above, they appreciate that integration is necessary both across disciplines and with communities. A couple of the chapters have much more

to say about community than about interdisciplinarity, but the book as a whole tells us much about the role that interdisciplinarity can and might play in community development.

The nine papers in the book (after the editorial introduction) are organized in three groups of three. The first three further clarify the meaning of interdisciplinary community development in practice. The next three look at academic discourse. The final three address non-governmental organizations. Not surprisingly, the papers often address a wider range of questions than this classification might imply.

The first paper, "Towards Interdisciplinary Community Collaboration and Development: Knowledge and Experience from Israel and the USA," is of particular note. It summarizes the experience of two groups—one in Israel, the other in the United States—that gathered over a period of months to discuss the nature of interdisciplinary community development. In Israel only social workers are hired to do community development. The American group was thus more diverse; it was also more heavily weighted toward academics. While the Israeli group took longer to appreciate the value of interdisciplinarity, the results of content analysis of the two groups' deliberations were broadly similar. Multidisciplinarity may have benefits in terms of adding a particular insight to one's "toolkit"; such borrowings generally result from short-term interactions. Interdisciplinarity results from longer-term collaborations, generates a whole that is greater than its parts, and leads to the softening of disciplinary boundaries.

Both groups found the word "transdisciplinary" hard to define: it might mean the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries. The groups' discourse on this issue appears to reflect the changing definitions of transdisciplinarity one can find in the literature. Notably, their sense of the meaning of interdisciplinarity seems to accord well with the approach of AIS scholars.

The groups went on (interactively) to identify four types of interdisciplinarity:

1. **Harmonic:** the generation of a new unified theory. [This might accord, I note, with some of the earlier definitions of transdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarians have at least moved away from a belief that interdisciplinarity analysis is successful only if it generates a unified theory.]

2. **Dialectic:** The synthesis of different insights.

3. **Dynamic:** The generation of a new solution to a problem.

4. **Pluralistic:** Here it is suggested that—due to problems of incommensurability—interdisciplinary discourse may suggest many possible policies, and only policy experimentation will allow the best of these to be identified.

Most members of AIS would likely feel comfortable with both the second and third types (which are complementary, I would think). I myself think that incommensurability is a misnomer—the challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship are not that severe—but can appreciate nevertheless that interdisciplinary discourse need not identify only one path forward. It is indeed a common tenet of interdisciplinary scholarship (not to mention step 11 in the 12-step process for interdisciplinary analysis I published in *Issues* in 2002) that the insights generated by interdisciplinary scholarship need then to be tested. Interdisciplinarity can generate superior public policies, but not flawlessly, and the results of even an interdisciplinary conversation need to be treated with care.

Both groups concur that interdisciplinarity works best when it is combined with cross-organizational collaboration and interaction with actual communities. To be sure these different sorts of interaction increase the complexity of the collaboration, but at the same time they seem to encourage openness of all types. I am not sure to what extent these benefits may flow from the problem-orientation that may characterize these other sorts of interaction. Since different organizations bring different perspectives to issues, it could also be that interdisciplinarity comes to be seen as essential to inter-organizational cooperation.

It is also argued that the value of interdisciplinarity increases with the complexity of the social problem(s) addressed. The relationship between interdisciplinarity and "complexity" has been addressed at length within the AIS since (at least) Bill Newell suggested in 2001 that interdisciplinarity was intimately linked to complexity.

The groups also agreed on a set of core competencies for interdisciplinary collaboration. These include critical thinking skills, priority setting, problem solving, and abilities to recognize needs, appreciate power imbalances, and appreciate different types of data. There is also a set of interpersonal skills: communication, relationship building, conflict management, consensus orientation, leadership, and respect. And finally attitudes of passion, integrity, energy, humility, self-reflection, creativity, and acceptance of uncertainty are invaluable. I was sorry that the word "open-minded" did not appear on the list, though it seems implied by other entries.

In both groups two fears were commonly voiced. One was that a

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particular discipline might dominate a particular conversation. Another was that interdisciplinary analysis might be superficial. Both groups felt that these concerns could be addressed in practice.

Later chapters address the necessity of integrating insights from not only all human science disciplines but also several professions. Community development often requires legal action (social work increasingly stresses the rights of the powerless), and thus legal advice must be integrated with insights into the key needs of the community. In many communities illiteracy is a barrier to community development, and thus insights from educators are essential. Family violence can only be addressed through cooperation between (at least) social workers, health professionals, and legal and law enforcement professionals. Social entrepreneurship may be an important component of community development and requires the integration of business practices with social services. Public policy professionals are not explicitly mentioned, but these could readily be added to the list. [And I confess I have elsewhere advocated an explicitly interdisciplinary component in the curriculum of public policy programs.]

It is argued in multiple chapters that it is easier for NGOs to be interdisciplinary than for government bureaucracies. The chapter on Nigeria in particular criticizes the top-down nature of government programs (grounded in disciplines) as opposed to the consultative orientation of NGOs. Yet we should be wary of such a blanket conclusion: one of the nodal points of this international collaboration is the Israeli government bureaucracy. While government bureaucracies may be fertile ground for disciplinary narrowness, this clearly need not be the case.

The chapter on India identifies a further rationale for synergy between interdisciplinarity and community development. The latter involves mobilizing against entrenched interests. But disciplines themselves are entrenched interests. Interdisciplinarity subverts these entrenched interests in an effort to understand (and then change) the world. The chapter on Nigeria also speaks of interdisciplinarity as a strategy for contesting entrenched power. Interdisciplinarity allows communities freedom of choice, for they can aspire to design and evaluate diverse policy recommendations. [Note the element of pluralistic interdisciplinarity here.]

A number of key questions were raised explicitly in the book. In particular, it was wondered how individuals can be trained for work in interdisciplinary community development. Should interdisciplinary community development be undertaken by teams drawn from many fields, and, if so, how should each field address interdisciplinarity in its curriculum? Or should there be some core field (a new interdisciplinary field of community development, or a subfield within social work), and, if so, how should its students be educated to interact constructively with experts from other fields?

My thoughts are that a core field opens the door to disciplinary imperialism, unless that core field is resolutely grounded in an interdisciplinary orientation. That is, teaching about the nature of interdisciplinarity and how it is best pursued would have to lie at the core of training in any core field. The editors appreciate that this is far from the case in contemporary programs in social work. The ability of those trained in any core field to interact with others will be enhanced to the extent that these others also have an appreciation of both the value of interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary best practices. And thus the challenge is to ensure that a wide range of academics and professionals are familiar with the nature of interdisciplinarity and interdisciplinary best practices. The AIS literature and especially Allen Repko's forthcoming text (aimed at senior undergraduates and graduate students) form the most promising basis for such an enterprise (Szostak, 2007).

I am sure that many readers of this newsletter will have their own insights on these questions. I invite them to join the conversation.

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AIS website ...

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Connections section with links to related organizations—all easily accessed from the homepage.

One new feature users should find particularly helpful is the capability to search the site by entering a keyword. There is also a handy sitemap.

The website redesign was completed by i.e. designs, based in Columbia, South Carolina, under a contract with the Association. Although the redesigned website went online in late March, work on it continued through April, and updated material is still being added to certain pages.

The Association welcomes your feedback on the redesigned website. To comment, go to the Feedback section (under Contact Info from the homepage) or email aisorg@muohio.edu. ■■■

30th Annual AIS Conference

October 23rd - 26th 2008 - Springfield, Illinois

Dear Colleagues,
The University of Illinois at Springfield invites you to participate in the 30th Annual Conference of the Association for Integrative Studies, scheduled for October 23-26, 2008. The conference will serve as a celebration of 30 years of work by the Association for Integrative Studies to promote interdisciplinary and integrative teaching and scholarship.

The 2008 conference theme is Interdisciplinarity and the Engaged Citizen: Integrating Higher Education, Public Policy, and Global Action.

As higher education promotes citizenship, ethics, and social responsibility, the benefits of interdisciplinary and integrative discussion and problem-solving become clearer. UIS therefore welcomes papers, panels, workshops, roundtables, and creative presentations in the categories of:

- Engagement and Knowledge Making
- Engagement and Public Policy
- Engagement in Teaching and Learning
- Engagement and Action

While attending the conference, you'll have an opportunity to explore Springfield. In the heart of Central Illinois, the "Land that Lincoln Loved," Springfield is the state capital and the site of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, where we'll host a reception and dinner during the conference. The conference hotel, The President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, sits in the heart of downtown Springfield and offers access to historical sites associated with Lincoln and the spectacularly preserved Dana-Thomas House, a Frank Lloyd Wright design. Restaurants, theaters, shopping, nightlife, and other attractions are within walking distance.

Please join us in Springfield for the 30th Annual Conference of the Association for Integrative Studies!

Karen R. Moranski and the AIS Conference Planning Team
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Link to the Conference website from the AIS website homepage, www.muohio.edu/ais

Things to do this summer:

Visit the AIS website, www.muohio.edu/ais

(See story on page 7)

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(Information on page 11)

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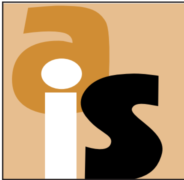

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