

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES FOR STUDENTS MATRICULATED AFTER SEPT. 3, 2014 BUT BEFORE SEPT. 7, 2021

Statements

Overview

Students who wish to address complex questions or engage in broad exploration of knowledge may wish to choose the Interdisciplinary Studies area of study.

The Interdisciplinary Studies area of study offers general or liberal, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary studies approaches, each of which differs from the others in important ways.

- **General or liberal studies approach** makes it possible for you to broadly explore your academic interests without having to define a disciplinary focus or foci. This approach is typically formatted as a one-column degree program with a concentration labeled "General Studies," "Liberal Studies," "Liberal Arts," or "Liberal Arts and Sciences," depending on the content of the degree plan. It may incorporate elements of multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary approaches.
- **Multidisciplinary approach** enables you to compare two or more disciplines side by side in ways that may or may not overlap. This can be useful for open-ended comparison(s) of different approaches to themes or problems you wish to explore. A concentration of this nature might be called something like "Multidisciplinary Approaches to X."
- **Interdisciplinary approach** allows you to address complex questions that cannot be answered by any one single discipline. The core method of Interdisciplinary Studies (referred to as IDS in the remainder of this document to differentiate it from the overarching Interdisciplinary Studies area of study) is to integrate theories and practices from two or more academic disciplines into one integrated program, creating opportunities to craft new approaches to meet specific interests and situations.

Note: Students who intend to pursue graduate degrees in IDS should utilize this approach when developing their undergraduate degree programs. You should familiarize yourself with the disciplinary discussion of IDS via the Association of Interdisciplinary Studies, or AIS

All of these approaches to Interdisciplinary Studies area of study degrees, while highly flexible, should align with the college learning goals. The following should be demonstrated and identified in your essay.

- **Active Learning:** Assess and build upon previous learning and experiences to pursue new learning, independently and in collaboration with others.
- **Breadth and Depth of Knowledge:** Cultivate a broad, interdisciplinary understanding in the liberal arts and sciences, as well as expertise in a particular field.

- **Social Responsibility:** Engage in ethical reasoning and reflect on issues such as democratic citizenship, diversity, social justice and environmental sustainability, both locally and globally.
- **Communication:** Express and receive ideas effectively, in multiple contexts and through multiple strategies.
- **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:** Evaluate, analyze, synthesize and critique key concepts and experiences and apply diverse perspectives to find creative solutions to problems concerning human behavior, society and the natural world.
- **Quantitative Literacy:** Read, interpret, use and present quantitative information effectively.
- **Information and Digital Media Literacy:** Critically assess, evaluate, understand, create and share information using a range of collaborative technologies to advance learning, as well as personal and professional development.

Some learning goals may be met in courses within this area of study or your degree concentration, while others may be met through general learning. Many of these goals will be reflected throughout your interdisciplinary studies.

Area of Study Guidelines

Because this area of study offers widely varied degree approaches, ranging from general exploration to intensively examined, focused projects, it has three separate sets of guidelines. In your rationale essay, be sure to indicate which set you are following.

Also, make sure to specify which approach you will take within your degree plan. (This is typically done through naming the concentration as one of the approaches just described.)

General, Liberal, or Liberal Arts and Sciences Degree Approach Guidelines

The guidelines for General, Liberal, or Liberal Arts and Sciences degrees (hereafter called General Studies) must abide by SUNY and ESC requirements for all degree programs, which include the following:

- Meets SUNY general education requirements.
- Demonstrates breadth (see note 1 below).
- Demonstrates progression (see note 2 below).
- Addresses ESC requirements for degree levels and types (see the Student Degree Planning Guide).
- Addresses college learning goals.

In addition, in the rationale essay you must indicate why you chose this broad and exploratory structured approach to your education and how it meets your personal or professional goals.

Note 1: Breadth is defined as foundations in diverse knowledge areas which are often met by general education requirements.

Note 2: Progression typically means that introductory studies are followed by advanced, more specific studies. For example, a foundation in sociology might be followed by any number of topical or research methods studies in that field.

Multidisciplinary Degree Approach Guidelines

In addition to meeting the general studies degree requirements, students developing a multidisciplinary degree should clearly identify a theme, problem, issue, or interest that they intend to examine from multiple disciplinary perspectives. You should name those disciplines and state what you expect them to contribute to understanding the theme. To

choose these, you can review the guidelines of various areas of study and consider which are relevant to your project.

Along with the requirements of the General Studies degree, your degree plan and rationale essay for a multidisciplinary degree should describe how your learning through prior learning or ESC studies clearly addresses the Interdisciplinary Studies area of study guidelines by:

- Including **foundational knowledge** in multiple disciplines and explaining how you selected them to address a theme, question, or topic of interest
- Building on that foundational knowledge to show **progression** in each selected discipline
- **Comparing** what the diverse disciplinary approaches brought to your understanding of the theme, question, or topic.

Interdisciplinary Degree Approach Guidelines

Much like a multidisciplinary degree, IDS degrees draw from several disciplinary fields to address a theme, question, or topic of interest. However, rather than comparing how different disciplines approach a problem, they take the additional step of synthesizing these approaches as integrated learning. Since two or more disciplines are integrated to yield a unique, synthesized perspective, each individual educational experience may include different additional learning outcomes. An IDS degree can integrate knowledge from historical studies, cultural studies, political science, social science, literary studies, the arts and/or additional perspectives, depending on exactly which interest you pursue.

Examples of some recognized interdisciplinary fields are:

- Africana Studies.
- Ethnic Studies.
- Native American Studies.
- Women's Studies.

The concerns of such fields cannot be understood easily through a stand-alone discipline, or fully resolved through disciplinary comparison (i.e., a multidisciplinary approach).

Aside from the fields above, you may select other themes, problems, or questions to address. Since IDS is process-oriented, each individual educational experience may include different learning outcomes. However, this may not be a linear process; your sense of the problem, and even the problem itself, will change as you progress. You can consult with texts or experts, or may already have theoretical and methodological experience in a field, in which case PLAs can fulfill part of the process. You should review the guidelines for various areas of study, traditional and nontraditional coursework and other concentrations in order to determine how best to address your theme, question, or topic of interest.

Note: This review is meant to inform you rather than guide you. Consult your mentor during this process.

Along with the requirements for General Studies, your degree plan and rationale essay for an IDS degree should clearly address the Interdisciplinary Studies area of study guidelines by describing how your learning:

- **Identifies** a theme, question, or problem.
- Incorporates knowledge from **multiple disciplinary foundations** to address the identified theme, question, or topic of interest.

- Demonstrates **progression** evidenced through introductory, intermediate and advanced knowledge within those disciplines that address aspects of your complex question, topic, or theme.
- **Integrates** knowledge gained from two or more disciplines to address your question or theme.
- **Applies a comprehensive perspective** in a capstone study that synthesizes learning to address your identified theme, question, or problem.

Conclusion

Whether you conceive of your undergraduate education as a chance to freely explore, a chance to compare and contrast how scholars and others understand something that concerns you, or a chance to integrate diverse understandings and create your own unique contribution to such understanding, you can do so in Interdisciplinary Studies.