

INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES FOR STUDENTS MATRICULATED BEFORE SEPT. 3, 2014

Bachelor's Degrees

A key characteristic of concentrations within interdisciplinary studies is that they bridge two or more program areas to connect or combine the different perspectives of those areas. These combinations and linkages can be developed by:

- Including studies from two or more areas that relate to a single theme or topic (e.g., various business courses and communication studies combined into a concentration called communication in organizations).
- Combining different area perspectives within a single study (e.g., political, economic, literary and social perspectives combined in a study titled Modern China).

Most interdisciplinary concentrations include both types of study.

Some concentrations are interdisciplinary by nature, and already recognized and defined by the scholarly community; examples are environmental studies, cognitive science or Native American studies. Students with such concentrations may wish to examine survey or introductory textbooks and study college catalogs to determine what these known concentrations typically cover.

On the other hand, an interdisciplinary concentration also can be created to match a particular student's interest. As with all concentrations, it may be focused upon a theme, problem or profession, or on a topic that necessarily includes several disciplines; examples selected from approved student programs include arts management, culinary educational studies, holistic health or writing as therapy.

As with all concentrations, the structure of interdisciplinary studies concentrations must meet the college's expectations of progression and integration:

- **Progression** refers to a significant development in the program from introductory to increasingly advanced learning. It is usually demonstrated when the concentration includes foundation studies in the different areas and further studies that either refine the foundation areas and/or combine different areas relevant to the concentration.
- **Integration** refers to the concentration's organization or form, in other words, to how the individual studies come together to support or define the concentration's theme or topic.

A common way of establishing a concentration's integral structure is to:

1. Subdivide the concentration into three or four major areas that, in the student's view, cover the key components of the problem or theme of the concentration.
2. Identify which studies in the degree program belong to which component. The component parts might be entirely original with the particular concentration, or they might be borrowed from the guidelines of other program areas.

For example, a professionally oriented interdisciplinary concentration might comprise studies in history, theory and practice; a social science-oriented concentration, borrowing from psychology, might comprise studies in academic methods (e.g., research or evaluation skills), disciplinary surveys, relevant practice skills (e.g., interviewing, counseling, problem solving) and integrated advanced-level studies.

The concentration components also could be content based. For example, a concentration in women's health could be subdivided into three main areas: studies about women, studies about health and studies that integrate women and health.

Note: Subdivisions of an interdisciplinary concentration are typically not the different disciplines or perspectives that make the concentration interdisciplinary; rather, each subdivision is itself a combination of perspectives.

Defining the Concentration

It is when the subdivisions are combined that the concentration is defined as a whole. In recognition of the importance of the whole, a unique requirement for interdisciplinary concentrations is the inclusion of one study that explicitly integrates the key component parts. In most instances, this integrating study carries the same title as the concentration. Depending upon the student's needs, it can occur at any time during the student's studies.

The written rationale also plays an important role in defining the interdisciplinary-studies concentration. To provide an adequate account of the purpose and meaning of the concentration, beside the usual topics, the interdisciplinary rationale also should include:

- An explicit discussion of the different program areas represented in the concentration.
- The underlying structure (method of integration).
- The nature of the integrating study.
- The student's reason(s) for choosing the interdisciplinary program for his or her concentration.

The following interdisciplinary examples are not prescriptive; these programs could have comprised any number of other studies or types of organization. The left column shows how the structure of the example was conceptualized, and the right column lists those studies that comprise the example components. The integrating study is marked with an asterisk.

Women's Health

In this example, the concentration draws upon studies from science, mathematics and technology, community and human services, human development and cultural studies. Progression is shown by foundation studies in the different disciplines, intermediate- and advanced-level integration studies; the integrating study, women and health, serves to capstone the entire program.

Note: The structure is by content rather than function.

Health

Human Biology
Nursing Arts
Personal Adjustment
Human Development
Health Psychology
Health Industry in the U.S.

Women

Introduction to Women's Studies
Adolescence: Growing up Female
Feminist Theory
Middle and Old Age: Social Issues for Women

Women and Health

AIDS: Special Issues for Women
Mental Health Problems for Women
Medical Approaches to Aging: Gender Issues
Women and Health: Past and Future

Professional Training and Development

This concentration combines studies from human development and educational studies, along with studies from either business, management and economics or community and human services, depending upon the student's orientation. Progression is shown by foundation studies in psychology, education, communications and human services (or business), and integrated studies that are largely intermediate and advanced.

The integrating study is an intermediate-level survey of the purposes and methods of professional training and development.

Single Perspectives

Human Development Foundations of Education
Basic Communication Skills
Overview of Human Services (or Survey of Business Organizations)

Integrated Studies

Professional Training and Development: Purposes and Methods
Adult Development and Learning
Workshop Design and Implementation
Learning Theory

Methods of Analysis

Program Evaluation
Tests and Measurement in Education Statistics

Criminal Justice

In this example, the concentration draws on studies from community and human services, social theory, social structure and change and human development. Progression is shown by foundation studies in human services, sociology and psychology as well as introductory surveys in criminal justice and corrections, by intermediate and advanced studies in the different areas (e.g., probation and parole) and by advanced integrated studies (e.g., crime and poverty, ethnic issues in corrections).

The integrating study in this program is an introductory survey of the entire field.

History

Introduction to Criminal Justice
Incarceration in America: A History

Theory

Theories of Correction
Introduction to Sociology
Human Behavior
Crime and Poverty
Ethnic Issues in Corrections
Crime and Corrections in the Middle East and Europe

Practice

Criminal Law
Probation and Parole
Program Evaluation
Statistics
Internship: Division For Youth

Note: A criminal justice concentration also could be designed to fit within the community and human services program area or as a specialty of sociology within the social theory, social structure and change program area.

Associate Degrees

Students select the interdisciplinary studies program area for their associate degrees for at least two very different reasons.

- Students may wish to construct an interdisciplinary concentration or focus along the lines of the bachelor's degree program, but with fewer credits. For them, the bachelor's degree guidelines can be followed, although without so much emphasis upon progression and comprehensiveness.
- Students are either not yet prepared, or do not wish to construct a comprehensive concentration or focus. In this case, all studies are listed within a single column and the program can be regarded as somewhat comparable to a broad liberal-arts or social-science major at local community colleges. The concentrations of such programs have no title, or they may be called general studies, liberal studies or interdisciplinary. The student should consult the mentor about the appropriateness of a one-column or two-column format for the associate degree. A program with a concentration in liberal studies, for example, may employ a one-column format or a two-column format that differentiates liberal studies and nonliberal studies.

Although single-column programs are not organized around a concentration or focus, they still have an order or an underlying organizational plan. The purpose of these programs is to introduce the student to a broad spectrum of studies that illustrate different (often conflicting) concerns, perspectives and methods of higher education's academic disciplines. At the same time, the program can include foundation studies in areas that interest the student, in particular his or her projected concentration for the bachelor's degree (assuming it is known), and associated fields, regardless of whether they fall within an existing discipline.

A Broad Spectrum of Studies

In designing these programs students need to explore and understand the meaning of a broad spectrum of studies. Traditionally, breadth is defined by including in a program a minimum of two or three studies from each of the broad areas of the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences and mathematics.

A slightly different way of defining breadth might be to include a couple of studies from each of a number of Empire State College's different program areas.

The traditional approach will ensure that students will be introduced to a number of existing disciplines (such as psychology or history); the program-area approach also will introduce students to subject areas where several disciplines are explicitly combined (such as women's studies or environmental science). Although both approaches, alone or in combination, are appropriate, they are by no means the only way of conceptualizing breadth.

The key requirement is that once students determine how breadth is to be achieved in their program, they must explain it in their written rationale. They need to describe how their interpretation of breadth meets their own particular needs and purposes and how it provides underlying structure to their program. Thus, the rationale becomes as important a part of the associate degree program as the actual selection of studies.

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