

Proposal for Establishing a Program in Interdisciplinary Studies in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Miami

Rationale

New research and inquiry questions emerge seemingly every day; some develop in new fields of study, others are eventually subsumed into existing ones. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of the questions to which we seek answers often require that scholars from many disciplines collaborate on creative solutions. Interdisciplinary research and teaching are at the core of all major research universities. The Faculty Manual states (A4.2) that among the powers and duties of each School are “to promote the educational and research policy and the general welfare of the school” and “to formulate plans for the future development of the school.” In order to take on the research and teaching challenges of today and to plan adequately for the future of the College, we seek approval to establish a Program in Interdisciplinary Studies. This Program will be responsible for overseeing and administering courses, minors, and majors that are truly interdisciplinary in nature but do not (yet) have a home Program or Department in which they are adequately housed. This would provide the College with the flexibility needed to allow faculty to experiment with new courses and programs of study.

Proposed Structure and Goals

There currently exist eight interdisciplinary programs in the College of Arts and Sciences: Africana Studies, American Studies, Ecosystem Science and Policy, Judaic Studies, Latin American Studies, Neuroscience, Urban Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies. Each of them avails itself of a director, and most have steering committees. Administratively, most of them share a staff person and classroom/seminar space. The proposed Program would be run by a steering committee of three faculty members, presumably one each in the arts or humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Their initial appointment will be made by the Dean of the College in consultation with faculty members; subsequently, the steering committee might grow to include relevant colleagues from the initiatives administered by the Program.

The relationship of the new Program to the existing IDS Programs would mirror existing ones as for example the one in American Studies.

The new proposed Independent Major would be housed in this new Program, as well as a potentially new minor in the works on Medical Humanities (a faculty committee has been formed to consider this minor). It will also be possible for faculty to teach interdisciplinary courses without clearing undue administrative hurdles, which constitute a disincentive from doing so. An example would be “Science, Society, and Policy,” taught in the UM in DC program in Fall 2013. Furthermore, the support that truly interdisciplinary courses require from a pedagogical standpoint is different from that needed by discipline-specific classes; the steering committee will be tasked with offering guidance and help, and potentially to coordinate with other Programs to support their pedagogical mission, too.

Fiscal implications for establishing this Program would be non-existent, at least initially. Steering committee members will serve as part of their service commitment to the College, and the minimal administrative support needed would be provided by the current assistant in the IDS office. In the future, should the number of activities housed in this unit grow, the appointment of a Director might become necessary, thus necessitating a stipend and teaching release.