

InterConnection

Interdisciplinary Studies at Duke

More than a name



“Interdisciplinary.”
 “Multidisciplinary.”
 “Transdisciplinary.”
 Those are a few of the terms used to describe research and thinking that occurs across, around, between, and against the training, methods, specializations, and standards that we define as “disciplinary.”

Over the years, I’ve heard various people in assorted fields or representing different funding agencies (from the NIH to NEA) arguing for why one of those terms best describes the work they do. There is no consensus about the definitions—but that doesn’t stop people from having definite ideas about

their goals.

For some, collaboration is what is important. Their objective is to bring together individuals with strong disciplinary training to solve a complex problem that no one could solve alone. They often insist that this is the most “rigorous” form of inter (or multi- or trans-) disciplinary work.

Others insist that this method aims too low. They prefer inter (multi-, trans-) disciplinarity that forces intellectual collisions. They seek to explode cherished assumptions of each discipline in order to think anew. They envision something bigger, more expansive, and more

rigorous (in that it challenges foundational assumptions) than what individual disciplines have to offer.

I value the way these arguments push us to think critically and creatively about what we want. In fact, I don’t much care which word someone is comfortable using. The prefixes are indefinite enough to accommodate various readings.

And, no matter which name we choose, to each I say “yes, but . . .” The “yes” is because these arguments are all useful. The “but” is because there is something to be learned from the counter-arguments as well. (cont. p.2)

Encouraging Interdisciplinary Connections

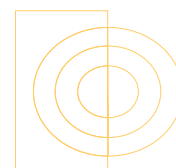
Welcome to the inaugural issue of **InterConnection** the newsletter for Duke’s interdisciplinary programs.

InterConnection offers a vehicle for communicating information about your programs and events and invites interchange about interdisciplinarity at Duke and beyond.

We invite you to submit:

- Articles
- Announcements
- Notifications of research opportunities
- Invitations for collaboration
- Any other information you deem relevant to interdisciplinary studies at Duke University.

InterConnection will be published six times a year. For details, deadlines, and submission information, please contact Celeste Lee.



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Special points of interest:

- Special Assistant for Interdisciplinary Programs appointed
- Genome, Ethics, Law and Policy (GELP) appoints new Director Robert Cook-Deegan
- Interdisciplinary Administrators Working Group (IAWG) open to all Center & Institute Administrators

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Vice Provost Cathy N. Davidson

“Any productive interaction among researchers in different disciplines leads to internal change”



Robert Cook-Deegan, M.D., Director, Center For Genome, Ethics, Law & Policy

More Than A Name (continued from p.1)

For me, there are three key questions: Is the whole equal to the sum of its parts? Greater than its parts? Or does the whole *change* its parts? I believe any non-trivial collaboration across disciplines leads to all three.

Any *productive* interaction among researchers in different disciplines leads to internal change (even if we are too proud to admit it). What we learn in context and contest with other disciplines shapes how we think about our own. In fact, it is often in explaining one's discipline

to someone in another field that we even grasp what the contours of our field really are or how those contours have changed over time.

My point is that words such as “rigor” or “innovation” can be as arbitrary or tautological as terms such as “interdisciplinary” or “multidisciplinary.” Rigor can be the goal of excellence to which we all aspire—or it can be that which looks familiar. Nor is innovation good for its own sake. Nor is interdisciplinarity necessarily the site of innovation. Disciplines, too, are in

a constant state of flux.

Whether Classics or Neurobiology, no field looks the same today as it did even five years ago. That's what scholarship is. We wouldn't need universities if knowledge was static. However we choose to label what we do, we wouldn't be here if we weren't interested in learning as we teach and teaching as we learn.

Cathy N. Davidson

Why Duke?

As the new Director of the Center for Genome Ethics, Law, and Policy (GELP), I can unequivocally state that I am at Duke because it seems possible to do interdisciplinary work here in a way that is more difficult at other major research universities. GELP –one of five centers in Duke's nascent Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy - is inherently multidisciplinary. One of GELP's primary functions is to bridge genome sciences to other disciplines, and to link the medical campus to the rest of the university. This bridge must be built to carry two-way traffic, or it will not do its job.

Before joining GELP, I solicited advice from colleagues. One conversation was particularly memorable. A famous historian of science and technology told me flat out, “Don't take the job. Such centers are hopeless, because everybody wants them to do everything, but then won't budge an inch to

help them succeed.” While I did not heed this advice, I did not ignore it. During my recruitment I asked about how similar centers at Duke were faring and was told that Duke is committed to interdisciplinary initiatives and makes them work. What convinced me, however, were two pieces of evidence. The first was that among the universities with major commitments to genome science, only Duke has proposed an integrated approach that incorporates fields outside science into the plan.

The second was simply a feeling. More precisely, the rekindling of a feeling dormant for a decade. I left a molecular biology laboratory twenty years ago to join the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA). At OTA I discovered I loved my work with a passion that narrow disciplinary research never inspired. I later worked for numerous institutions that did interdisciplinary work,

but only OTA ever had a team ethos that made multidisciplinary work the norm, rather than something that required violating norms to make it work.

I harbor no illusions that Duke will be exactly like OTA. Duke's stature depends on maintaining prestige within disciplines. But Duke also seems to have discovered that its future stature will depend on attracting the best faculty and students, and they will want to do the exciting work to be found across disciplines.

Multidisciplinary work succeeds when it truly *draws on* many disciplines, not when it is done *instead of* disciplinary teaching or research. Picking important problems that require diverse kinds of expertise to solve is the key to success. Genome sciences are important to our future. Duke has structured its genome programs to take account of the broad impact that the technology (cont. p. 3)

Why Duke (continued from p. 2)

will have and the diversity of perspective needed to guide the science and technology—that is why I am here.

Robert Cook-Deegan, M.D.

For Additional Information on GELP or other IGSP Centers visit:

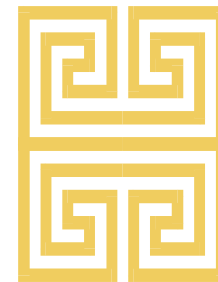
<http://www.law.duke.edu/gelp/>

http://www.genomics.duke.edu/home/top_flash.cgi

Special Assistant for Interdisciplinary Programs

Celeste Castillo Lee was appointed Special Assistant for Interdisciplinary Programs on February 1, 2003. She will concentrate on management, personnel, and administrative efforts for Duke's interdisciplinary research units and will be the chief communicator for these efforts at Duke and beyond. Among her responsibilities

will be to manage the annual report and review process for Duke's centers, chair the Interdisciplinary Administrators Working Group (IAWG), edit InterConnection, and oversee the administration for the Provost's Common Fund Award and the Smith Faculty Enrichment Fellowship Award.



Celeste Castillo Lee
Special Assistant for Interdisciplinary Programs

Q & R with Victoria Lodewick, Director University Scholars Program

Q: How does the University Scholars Program differ from other scholarship programs at Duke?

R: Most scholarships target students according to their age group or program of study. The USP, on the other hand, offers awards to undergraduate, graduate and professional school students to create an intergenerational community of scholars. Scholars are selected based on merit (and financial need, for

undergraduates) and demonstrate potential for interdisciplinary thinking, another distinguishing hallmark of the program. While many undergraduates are beginning to learn what interdisciplinarity means, our brilliant older students can model it for them, based on their own interdisciplinary work. University Scholars meet regularly to lead seminars based on their own research and to meet with distinguished

lecturers and artists. The students also work together on a symposium each spring, based on a collectively chosen theme. It's a wonderful experience for the students to collaborate on shared intellectual interests, irrespective of their age differences and academic pursuits.

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For more information on the University Scholars Program

“While many undergraduates are beginning to learn what interdisciplinarity means, our brilliant older students can model it for them”



Duke University

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Fostering New Structures to Encourage Interdisciplinary Connections

LOOK FOR US SOON ON
THE WEB
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Helpful Hints for the Interdisciplinary Administrator

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Undergraduate University Scholars Julia Cormano and Mariana Carrera, **Class of 2004**, at the Spring 2002 USP Symposium, "Exposing Privacy"



Announcements / TIPS

- Interdisciplinary Administrators Working Group (IAWG) was created in 2001 to offer networking opportunities for administrators of Interdisciplinary Programs. Please contact celeste.lee@duke.edu for more information.
- Scheduling a fall class? THE TIME IS NOW!! Contact Jim Salerno, Assistant Registrar at Jim.Salerno@duke.edu or submit your room request to roomreservation@duke.edu
- Annual Reports for all centers are due to Vice Provost for Interdisciplinary Studies by July 1, 2003. Contact Celeste.lee@duke.edu for more information.
- Announce your event to the entire Duke Campus on the Duke Public Events Calendar <http://calendar.duke.edu> contact Rob.little@duke.edu for more information.
- Performance Planning and Review Process should begin to take place in mid April. To obtain a template performance and review form see www.hr.duke.edu/utilities/managers/index.html
- Need a temporary employee? Go to http://www.hr.duke.edu/dts/job_order.html
- Duke News Service can help you with "getting the word out" see http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/contact_us.asp#news
- Kofi Annan to speak at Commencement Ceremony, Sunday May 11, 2003 at 10 a.m.

To request a subscription to **Inter-Connection** or for additional information on interdisciplinary studies at Duke, contact:

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