

Interdisciplinary Pillar team update, March 18, 2021

The Interdisciplinary Pillar Group continues its excellent and invigorating discussions, plenary and interspersed with discussions by three breakout groups targeting different topics that need to be addressed for a summary report. The group (or associated breakout groups) meets twice weekly, Tuesdays from 2:30 – 4:30, and Thursdays 3 – 5. chairs of the group are Ed Synakowski and Scott Henkel. Breakout group leaders are Jim Ahern (Organizations and Structures WG), Isa Helfgott (Stimulating Xdisciplinary Culture WG) , and Jeff Hamerlink (Partnerships, metrics, resources). Gabrelle Allen is facilitating as well as participating in the Xdisciplinary Culture breakout working group.

As we approach the deadline for report submission, we have drafted language to guide our thinking on some of our central concerns. For example, we articulate our objective in this work:

to identify ways to augment UW's practices and culture to position the university to lead and to be sought as an outstanding partner in research, scholarship, education, and engagement pertaining to some of the most pressing and complex problems facing Wyoming, the nation, and the globe. At the heart of this is learning to draw upon many disciplines to approach these problems, and to have researchers and scholars work together in an inter-, multi-, or transdisciplinary (for simplicity, referred to in what follows as "interdisciplinary," understanding that the nature of the solution sought varies by the nature of the problem) manner. The impact of taking on problems that demand interdisciplinary approaches can have profound impacts on the curricula as well, yielding great value to students as their education is framed around issues of great complexity, bringing forward in them a skill set to enable them to succeed in complex environments, a resiliency of high value as they enter a disruptive, rapidly evolving world. Note, though, that interdisciplinarity is not an end. Rather, it is a means for asking profound questions and addressing complex challenges, enabling the institution and society to move towards solutions that are as complete as possible.

We note that this work is among the best expressions of the land grant university mission, and as such, much of the work currently ongoing at UW will be positively expanded or amplified by the work of the Interdisciplinary Pillar Team.

A number of questions, proposals, and innovative ideas have emerged from our discussion. While these items individually are matters of short, medium, and long term scopes, and while the paths to addressing them ought to involve the broadest possible representation from faculty, staff, students, and the public as we move into the next phases of the strategic

scenario planning process, the Interdisciplinary Pillar team has spent considerable time and effort discussing how to:

- Form an Interdisciplinary Incubator at the highest level of the university.
- Create institutional home(s) for the Grand Challenges that cut across departmental and college lines.
- Establish a School of Graduate Studies whose mission includes identifying and nurturing research that includes engagement across disciplines, and nurturing research, scholarship, and teaching in disciplines that are components of UW high priority interdisciplinary research enterprises.
- Ensure that the ongoing policy for creating, evaluating, and sunseting institutes and centers is well suited for the emergent opportunities regarding interdisciplinary institutes and centers.
- Augment or redesign the RTP process and annual performance review to not only notice interdisciplinary activity performed by a faculty member, but also to reward and incentivize it—especially at the pre-tenure phase.
- Remove structural impediments and disincentives to collaboration in interdisciplinary teaching across campus.
- First Year Experience: launch new curricula and Learning-Living Communities for freshman that are centered on interdisciplinary challenges.
- USP Gen Ed and Curricula – encourage and support the work of the Next Gen USP committee so that the curriculum is truly university-wide and is rooted in interdisciplinarity.
- Foster interdisciplinary knowledge co-production, economic development and workforce readiness through engagement activities across the state of Wyoming and the Mountain West region, as well as nationally and international.