

Editors' Introduction

In a forthcoming publication,¹ Janet Gail Donald's chapter, "The Commons: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters," begins by framing her work in the concept of the "commons" (p. 35), and specifically in the 18th century Scottish concept of common sense, "... a philosophy that is empirical, pragmatic, and yet moral in the most positive sense of the word" (p. 36). Her research, utilizing interviews and graduate student participant observers, focused on pedagogy in the disciplines of engineering, law, and English literature. One of her findings, which she found "disquieting," was that students in the disciplines were experiencing quite different educations. The emphasis on each of the three principles coming out of "common sense"—empiricism, pragmatism, and morality—varied from field to field. She did find similarities, however, in the activities involved in the thinking that students employed to address content. Students characteristically chose to (1) identify the context, (2) recognize organizing principles, and (3) change perspectives (p. 47). These findings do not lead her to focus on boundaries between disciplines, but to think of the disciplines as homes within the larger learning community. She suggests that further research is needed to determine commonalities among disciplines, and finally that "[i]nterdisciplinary encounters could begin here with the commons becoming the community."

The papers in this volume of *Issues in Integrative Studies* embrace that challenge and illuminate facets of debates surrounding interdisciplinary inquiry. Continuing disciplinary developments provide insights that reveal what interdisciplinarity is as much as they raise questions about the validity of interdisciplinary work. These papers suggest the interrelations between the disciplines and interdisciplinary encounters in the larger higher education community, and they vigorously pursue questions of definition, theoretical integrity, methodology, and accountability.

The papers we are pleased to bring to your attention cover a range of perspectives. There are those that rigorously engage the theoretical underpinnings of interdisciplinarity, focusing on how current theories interact with or are distinguished from interdisciplinary studies or interdisciplinarity; these additions to the literature of interdisciplinarity will prove indispensable to scholars and practitioners. Others bring theory to bear on practical pedagogical issues in critical ways, shedding light on the conduct of library research and the design of increasingly complex interdisciplin-

ary research and writing projects. Lastly, but as importantly, you will find an equally significant number of essays devoted to questions of expanded models of integration beyond the scholarly conventions, including our keynote address, on such topics as how powerful challenges to accepted definitions of scholarship, creativity, and presentation can advance inquiry; arguments for the role of intuition in interdisciplinary thinking; and a call for reflection about the ways in which the truly integrated scholar can reach more deeply into wisdom emerging from unexpected sources.

Allen Repko argues that integration is central to the understanding of interdisciplinarity, in contrast to an approach that describes interdisciplinarity as “loosely” bringing together more than one discipline. Following Newell, Klein, and others, Repko focuses on process. He draws on the theories of common ground and cognitive interdisciplinarity to argue that integration is not only possible (a position questioned by some in the context of interdisciplinary studies), but is based on ordinary thought processes; that attention to the context is essential; and that integration is best characterized as process, in contrast to method. After Repko examines the relationship between common ground and interdisciplinary integration, he concludes by reaffirming his position that integration is an achievable outcome of undergraduate and graduate learning in interdisciplinary courses.

Rick Szostak compares and contrasts modernism and postmodernism in order to make explicit divergent views about epistemological issues of interdisciplinarity. He takes an analytic approach to epistemological issues, asking whether or not enhanced scholarly understanding is possible; he addresses the question of scholarly bias. After intensive consideration of epistemology and methodology, he turns to the appropriate role of the disciplines. Finally, he addresses what such a review means to the future of scholarship and to higher education’s contribution to discourse more broadly: how scholarly works should be judged; what attitudes scholars might have toward methods and theories; and how scholars should address the current complexity of rapidly changing societal issues. The article furthers the project of making explicit underlying assumptions of interdisciplinary thinking.

Reflecting on his experiences both as an interdisciplinary scholar and as an instructor of upper level students developing their own interdisciplinary work, Newell addresses the complexity of the student research project. He attends to the organization of knowledge as it is commonly found in academic library resources, both print and electronic, and its implications for searching and identifying specific knowledge sources relevant to one’s proj-

ect. He notes the layered richness of familiar steps in the research process, such as the annotated bibliography, both for the compiler and the subsequent reader. Further, he suggests approaches such as templates that may be used to initiate students into the interdisciplinary literature review. Newell gives specific instructions for writing the interdisciplinary study, including developing the argument, structuring the work, writing the project, and analysis. Newell's work is useful to instructors seeking strategies to support student learning, to students themselves, as well as to scholars who are new to interdisciplinary scholarly processes.

Jean Petrolle is also interested in the interdisciplinary writing process, but from a different angle, explicitly inviting a consideration of the level of commitment of interdisciplinary scholars to more boldly integrative genres, both in their own work and in their reception of the work of others. Her approach is to challenge the distinction between scholarship and creative work and the vehicles for presentation conventionally attributed to each. Grounding her study in theoretical and experiential domains, she both makes an argument for greater attention to boundary crossing, and she models an alternative approach to scholarly discourse which highlights the hybridity and seamless integration of actual learning and inquiry.

James Welch's paper investigates the relation between intuition and interdisciplinary thinking. He takes an advocate's position, arguing the value and importance of intuition to interdisciplinary integration. To make his case, Welch shows how an understanding of intuition itself requires examining various disciplines, such as cognitive psychology and philosophy. He also shows applications of intuition in professional practice.

Lastly, we are pleased to provide an essay by Sarah "Amira" De la Garza adapted from her well-received presentation/performance at the 2007 Association for Integrative Studies Conference. It has already garnered much attention from attendees. De la Garza explores the concept of the integrative scholar, drawing upon her experience of a traumatic head injury and impaired cognitive ability in early career to prompt consideration of more expansive, risk-taking, and fluid notions of integration and boundary crossing. Her journey to Mexico proved pivotal in shaping a professional interest in the intersections among scholarship, mystical realism, physical well-being, and wisdom.

As the field of interdisciplinary studies continues to address the provocative questions of how learning occurs, what underlying assumptions fuel its contributions to education and to the public arena, and how it might productively advance inquiry and problem solving at the highest levels of need and

aspiration, such important work as represented in the 2007 volume deserves our keenest scrutiny and response. Through such engagement, the invitation posed by Janet Gail Donald to enter “the commons” might come closer to realization.

Joan Fiscella and Francine Navakas

Note

¹ See Janet Gail Donald’s article, “The Commons: Disciplinary and Inter-disciplinary Encounters,” (forthcoming 2009) in Carolin Kreber (Ed.), *The University and its Disciplines: Teaching and Learning Within and Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries* (pp. 35-49). New York: Routledge.