

## Editors' Introduction

We are proud to be the editors of this, the 30th volume of *Issues in Integrative Studies*, in part because it is the final volume to bear that title. The shift to *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, which starts with the 2013 volume, acknowledges the change in the name of the organization publishing this journal to the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies. As longtime members will know, the change follows decades of discussion about the definitions of integrative and interdisciplinary work and the relationship between them. Though most would now agree that fully interdisciplinary work must be integrative of the insights offered by disciplines, a consensus reflected in the articles in this volume, debate on the particulars of the concepts and processes involved is likely to continue for decades to come, and that is reflected in these articles as well. We wouldn't have it any other way.

We are also delighted by the range of the articles we have here—some focused on theory (though even the most theoretical can be useful in practice) and some focused on practice (though even the most practical connect meaningfully to theory). And we'd argue that the articles are pieces of high quality, too, a consequence of an unprecedented increase in submissions and an acceptance rate of only 20%.

In the opening article, "The Circulation of Knowledge as an Interdisciplinary Process: Travelling Concepts, Analogies, and Metaphors," Swiss scholar Frédéric Darbellay draws on a rich francophone literature of which most American interdisciplinarians are largely unaware as he urges us to think systemically about interdisciplinary process in terms of how disciplines (and their practitioners) are starting to interact with each other and with interdisciplinary fields. He is one of very few interdisciplinarians to call for "protecting . . . in-depth disciplinary research" as "necessary for advancing cutting-edge knowledge," though he is mindful of the dangers of "blind overspecialization" and celebrates those "who are beginning to look more carefully at the . . . limits of their own discipline and at ways of setting up new links with other disciplinary fields." He presents the image of interdisciplinarian as nomad, moving into new territory with ideas and images that allow communication between insider and outsider where none was before. He describes his article as an "appeal for arbitrary borders between communities of subject specialists to be transcended . . . and for researchers to adopt an interdisciplinary outlook."

William Abbott and Kathryn Nantz, the authors of our second article, "Building Students' Integrative Thinking Capacities: A Case Study in

Economics and History,” offer a “case study” in just the sort of interdisciplinary process Darbellay was speaking of, the process in which disciplines (and their practitioners) interact with each other and with interdisciplinary fields. As they report, years of experience team-teaching both a single course and a two-course cluster meant to be interdisciplinary have taught them how to be true interdisciplinarians themselves and how to teach their students to be so, too, or at least to develop those “habits of mind” that help them move towards true interdisciplinarity as *they* travel beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines. Abbott and Nantz discuss in detail how specific pedagogical tools such as assignments and classroom activities promote proto-interdisciplinary skills like connection-making that are pre-requisites to engaging in the full interdisciplinary process, especially integration. This article on the developmental approach to teaching integration that they have derived from their classroom experience represents the Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning, SOITL, at its useful best.

Another fine piece of SOITL work is Jeannie Brown Leonard’s article, “Integrative Learning: A Grounded Theory,” in which she draws upon years of others’ teaching (and resultant colleagues’ views) and years of others’ learning (giving students themselves a voice they don’t often have in scholarship of this sort). The work she’s done most recently, with students in an integrative learning program that is *not* characterized as an interdisciplinary program, shows her confirming the developmental nature of integrative learning, as Abbott and Nantz also do. Her major contribution, beyond grounding her theory in a rich array of empirical data, is the identification of intellectual stages through which students progress en route to integrative learning—stages she relates to those that other researchers of cognitive development have identified. Interestingly, she has discovered that students in the program under study do *not* demonstrate the capacity to integrate or synthesize that typifies the fourth or most advanced stage of development. Like Abbott and Nantz’s students, they have moved *towards* such capacity, but not claimed it. By way of contrast she cites earlier SOITL work by Bill Newell showing that students in a specifically interdisciplinary program *were* able to demonstrate the capacity to integrate in a senior capstone course.

In their article on “Interdisciplinary Studies and the Real World,” Benjamin Brooks and Evan Widders offer a piece perfectly described by its subtitle, “A Practical Rationale for and Guide to Post-Graduation Evaluation and Assessment.” Its approach is pragmatic, focusing on their experience collecting data not from students currently in the program under study (as

Abbott and Nantz and Leonard have done) but from students who have graduated from the program, alumni whose distance from and perspective on their undergrad experience make them as valuable a source of information as they are often underutilized. Even assessment-phobes will agree that the authors argue effectively for the usefulness of such assessment, not just in satisfying ever-increasing demands for demonstration of programmatic achievement but also in identifying areas where programs might benefit from change. (And Brooks and Widders do explain how they have used the research tool they have developed thus far to improve their program, as, for example, in its inculcation of their students’ integrative skills.) Certainly we editors are persuaded that widespread adoption of their approach could save an interdisciplinary program or two from the administrative axe, proving strengths and improving weaknesses, generating data useful in testing claims about the educational outcomes of interdisciplinary programs and identifying factors that shape those outcomes. Such empirical testing of interdisciplinary claims may well be the next big thing in interdisciplinary studies (and in the Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning). If so, this article may play a significant role in that effort.

In his article, “Interdisciplinary Studies and the Question of Being,” James Welch IV continues his scholarly project of mining the discipline of philosophy for insights into the nature and conduct of interdisciplinary studies. Two previous articles in this journal focused on the role of epistemology in interdisciplinarity, and a third on the role of intuition. Here, as in “Interdisciplinarity and the History of Western Epistemology” in Volume 27, Welch provides us with a historical survey of a category of philosophic thought, in this case ontology, especially ontological thought (Eastern and Western) that has explored the relationship between consciousness and reality. But this article offers much more than a compendium of philosophical ideas and arguments for non-philosophers to peruse. His theorizing, like that of others throughout this volume, has implications for our practice. He points out that it is often differing ontological assumptions that underlie conflicts in disciplinary insights, and argues that interdisciplinarians must learn to identify those assumptions to enable the creation of common ground on which to build the more comprehensive or integrative understanding that characterizes fully interdisciplinary work. More controversially, Welch argues for consciousness grounded in ontological pluralism as important if not essential to interdisciplinary integration.

Ken Fuchsman is another former contributor to *Issues* who is here pursuing a longtime project, the aforementioned longtime project of AIS itself, namely,

definitions of integrative and interdisciplinary work and their relationship to one another. In his article, "Interdisciplines and Interdisciplinarity: Political Psychology and Psychohistory Compared," he further develops a subject he, like Welch, first addressed in Volume 27: the fact that "attempts to integrate disciplinary ideas and methods can result in full, partial, incomplete, and multiple integrations." Here, he focuses on two of the "institutionalized hybrid fields" he (like Julie Klein) calls "interdisciplines," arguing that scholars in these fields too often fail to practice the full integration most interdisciplinarians preach. In limiting themselves to certain approaches out of the array of contending discourses within their respective parent disciplines, they favor congenial outlooks and methods while underplaying or ignoring other pertinent perspectives. As he puts it, "many scholars in these two specialties function within a conceptual comfort zone, uninterested in some relevant bodies of research." They settle into a sort of halfway house somewhere between the disciplines they supposedly integrate and truly interdisciplinary study. They would do well to emulate the more venturesome interdisciplinarians whom Darbellay celebrates in the opening article of this volume, those "nomads" who have concepts and will travel, dealing with the discomforts of the open road of inquiry until they arrive at a more integrated (and interdisciplinary) destination than a halfway house can ever be.

As we acknowledged in our opening paragraph, the debate, on this and on the many other matters interdisciplinarians deal with, goes on. But we think you will agree that the articles in this volume show that interdisciplinarians have moved well along towards a much more fully developed and finely nuanced understanding of interdisciplinarity in the years since AIS was founded. Further evidence of how far the interdisciplinary studies profession has come will be provided in our next volume, already slated to include articles by three prominent AIS scholars on the "State of the Field," invited in celebration of the 35th anniversary of our organization. We encourage you to submit articles for that volume, the first volume of the journal to be entitled *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. Instructions for prospective authors may be found inside the back cover of the print edition of this volume and on our AIS website. Gretchen Schulz and Pauline Gagnon, the editors of the 2013 volume, look forward to seeing what you have to say.

William H. Newell and Gretchen Schulz