

## Editors' Introduction

We are proud to be the editors of this, the 31<sup>st</sup> volume of the journal of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies and the first to reflect the shift in title that the Association itself has undergone, being entitled, as it is, *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. (Of course, we can happily assure you that there's been no shift in the essence, the kind and the quality, of the articles we're offering here and assure you that you'll find them as engaged with the integrative aspects of interdisciplinary work as has been the case from the beginning.) We're proud, too, that we've been able to arrange to have this volume ready rather earlier than usual, out before the annual conference so as to constitute a contribution to the especially celebratory occasion of this year's conference, the 35<sup>th</sup> since AIS was founded at Miami University. And how very appropriate it is that every article in this fine collection relates in some meaningful way to the subject matter central to this anniversary event, namely, the connections between the interdisciplinary academic work we're all involved in and the increasingly interdisciplinary work necessary in the world-at-large. As the spokespeople for the Miami conference have put it, "the 2013 conference will serve as a forum for a wide-ranging dialogue among scholars interested in the development of new approaches to teaching and research that will meet the complex needs of students, employers, and other stakeholders in our rapidly evolving society."

Of course, those of you who've been attending our conferences and reading our publications for some time will know that dialogue about the ways in which interdisciplinary or integrative studies prepares students for work in the real world—and, indeed, for life itself—is ongoing. The subject was actually central to last year's conference at Oakland University, as well, and logically so, since the conference theme was "Public Policy and the Promise of Interdisciplinary Dialogue." Jeff Williams, chief executive officer of Public Sector Consultants, hence a *non*-academic much involved with the real world, offered a particularly impactful plenary upon that occasion, on "how critical public works and policy questions cannot be solved by people trained in one discipline in isolation." We're offering a print version of his plenary here, as an apt introduction to all that follows from someone whose personal experience, both as a student whose own training was interdisciplinary and as a business professional whose consultancies have taught him much about the value of interdisciplinary training for other students emerging into the current market place, makes him an ideal exponent of our cause. We recommend that you *do* begin your perusal of this volume by reading this piece we've placed first in it, "Caught in the Act: Integrative Studies

Where I Least Expected It,” with its warnings against “hyper-specialization” and the “silos at institutions of higher education” (or departmental structures) that still promote such specialization-in-the-extreme. Williams readily acknowledges the value of disciplinary study (as most of us do), but he certainly makes the case for the need—the very great need—for interdisciplinarians who can integrate the insights of the disciplines to solve the complex problems that challenge us all.

The next three articles in this volume are particularly important pieces by leading interdisciplinarians whom AIS invited to present as plenaries-of-a-sort at the 2011 conference hosted by Grand Valley State University. These experts are *the* best qualified to discuss the “State of the Field” of interdisciplinarity itself, in terms of theory, research, and institutionalization, and in terms of work that’s already been done and work that remains to be done in these areas if interdisciplinary education is going to yield the sorts of graduates we all see as badly needed in our increasingly complex world. Since we realized this material would be especially relevant in connection with this fall’s conference and its (aforementioned) focus on “the development of new approaches to teaching and research that will meet the complex needs of students, employers, and other stakeholders in our rapidly evolving society,” we asked the experts for permission to offer it to you in this year’s volume of the journal instead of last year’s volume, and they agreed. Here, then, for your delectation (*and* enlightenment *and* use, for we do think you’ll find their pieces very useful, indeed) are Bill Newell (on interdisciplinary theory), Rick Szostak (on interdisciplinary research), and Julie Klein (on institutionalization of interdisciplinarity). We won’t try to summarize their discussions of what’s already been accomplished in each area and what’s still to be done—if IDS and IDR are to evolve in accordance with the values, theories, and practices we hold dear towards ever better integration with complementary endeavors within the academy and the real world beyond. We urge you to read the articles themselves for the information and inspiration no summaries could convey.

The next article in our collection is itself an excellent example of how complementarity in areas of endeavor can prompt productive theorizing that may in turn yield benefits for academics as well as for those in the world-at-large awaiting graduates with interdisciplinary and integrative capacities. In “Reframing Interdisciplinary and Interprofessional Collaboration Through the Lens of Collective and Sociomaterial Theories of Learning,” Angus McMurtry provides an overview of the ways multiple learning discourses connect to both IDS/IDR theory and interprofessional practice (in health care in particular). Though, as he says, the article is “exploratory rather than

comprehensive,” it is certainly provocative enough to entice further exploration into the applicability of the four theories of learning he focuses upon: communities of practice (CoP), cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), complexity science, and actor-network theory (ANT).

If McMurtry’s article is the perfect companion piece to Newell’s article on the evolution of theory in the interdisciplinary field, the next article here, by Paul Hirsch and Peter Brosius and many other authors, is the perfect companion piece to Szostak’s article on the State of the Field in IDR. It would be hard to imagine a better illustration of integrative interdisciplinary research than that described here by Hirsch, Brosius, and their many co-researchers-and-authors. They report on “Navigating Complex Trade-offs in Conservation and Development,” their charge in a long-term project called Advancing Conservation in a Social Context (ACSC), a project involving both academic and real-world stakeholders in sustainability from around the globe. Of greatest interest here is the insight (and widely applicable theory) that evolved as they developed the “integrative framework” that allowed them to accomplish all they did—namely, the insight that a process that defines “synthesis” as the best outcome of “integrative work” in offering, as it supposedly does, a “win-win” solution to complex issues, might benefit from a reframing that acknowledges the losses that *are* often involved in “win-win” solutions. They explain how their experience has left them convinced that a process more open about the “trade-offs” involved in integrative work can best serve “as a starting point for fertile and productive engagements between researchers working across disciplines, and between researchers and practitioners.”

We see the next articles in this collection as companion pieces to Klein’s article on the institutionalization of interdisciplinarity—and problems that are all too often apparent in that sphere. Both Yves Lenoir, whose article focuses on IDS at the elementary level in Quebec, and Jamila Razzaq, Tony Townsend, and John Pisapia, whose article focuses on IDR at the university level in Britain, discuss the confusions and attendant inadequacies that can and do obtain in both the conceptualization and implementation of interdisciplinary work when it’s been mandated by forces outside of the academy, or the institutions in question, anyway. Though they may be aware of the societal need for people skilled in work of this kind, such forces are often unclear on what such work entails and unable to be helpful when those expected to enact a mandate turn out to be unclear about it, as well.

In “Interdisciplinarity in Francophone Education: The Weal and Woe of a Research Journey,” Lenoir, one of the most distinguished interdisciplinarians in the world, and, we might add, a recipient of the Boulding Award that AIS bestows upon such individuals, reviews the issues that have arisen as K-6 educators have attempted to make the “integration of learning” that the Ministry of Education mandated as long ago as the 1970s into an effective reality. It hasn’t happened yet. The good news is that Lenoir has many good ideas to offer on how the specifics of curricular structures and professional training might be revised to enhance the understanding and enactment of work that is truly interdisciplinary and integrative.

In their article, “Towards an Understanding of Interdisciplinarity,” Razaq, Townsend, and Pisapia, review “The Case of a British University” where faculty and administrators have been scrambling to deal with recent mandates for interdisciplinary and integrative work, that is, to institutionalize such work, with programming that promotes IDR, in particular. Our co-authors took advantage of the opportunity to conduct a study (a very well-managed study) of the extent to which their colleagues, caught up in this endeavor, understood IDS and IDR and understood what they were doing themselves. Or trying to do. What their study uncovered was confusion—about as widespread as it could be—and frustration about that lack of clarity and the attendant lack of clarity about the place of such work within the University in question and, indeed, within the world of academe itself. Helpfully, and hopefully, they end their discussion with recommendations that might well result in changes for the better. At the very least, they’ve identified “issues of clarity of terminology and mission, flexibility of implementation, and alignment of faculty incentives as necessary but unmet conditions to fostering and promoting the interdisciplinarity” the powers-that-be beyond the “Great Western University” have begun to see as valuable—which is a good thing, after all.

In the next article, colleagues Tanya Augsburg and Tendai Chitewere offer an excellent example of the scholarship of teaching and learning, focusing on the pedagogies they have developed while team-teaching a gateway course for the Liberal Studies program at San Francisco State University, a course they were asked to create in response to, yes, yet another mandate for the institutionalization of interdisciplinarity. If they and their colleagues in the program are having more success than faculty in such a situation sometimes do (see above), that can probably be explained by the fact SFSU hired some experienced interdisciplinarians to undertake the work, people versed

in both the theory and practice in the field. (Augsburg had actually written the first textbook on IDS, *Becoming Interdisciplinary: An Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*, before assuming her position in San Francisco.) Their expertise in interdisciplinarity (and in the scholarship of interdisciplinary teaching and learning in particular) helped Augsburg and Chitewere to assess and revise their handling of the gateway course a number of times; the process issued in the five teaching techniques they have devised to help students grasp the all-important concept of “disciplinary perspective” by introducing them to the analogous (and more accessible) concept of “world-view” first. Their article, “Starting with Worldviews: A Five-Step Preparatory Approach to Integrative Interdisciplinary Learning,” will be useful to others who want to better prepare students for interdisciplinary work within the academy and beyond, in the real world, where dealing with others’ perspectives and views would seem to be more critical than ever before, for work well done and life well lived.

The final article in this collection is appropriately placed in that it looks back to issues raised in the earlier articles, not least their (variously expressed) concern with the way interdisciplinary academic work prepares students for work in the real world. It also looks forward to our upcoming conferences, not only the anniversary conference of this fall, dedicated (as we’ve noted) to “a wide-ranging dialogue among scholars interested in the development of new approaches to teaching and research that will meet the complex needs of . . . our rapidly evolving society,” but also the conferences of 2014 and 2015, first that on “Interdisciplinary Public Problems, the Global Community, and Diversity,” hosted by Michigan State University, and then that yet to be entitled but hosted by Merrimack College and The Center for Engaged Democracy housed at that institution. In “Contributions of Interdisciplinary Studies to Civic Learning: An Addendum to *A Crucible Moment*,” AIS Executive Director Bill Newell explains how the knowledge, values, and skills identified in that “Report to the Nation” as necessary for effective citizenship are in fact much enhanced through the interdisciplinary kind of education barely referenced in the report. It won’t surprise you to know he argues particularly well for the ways in which techniques for creating common ground, familiar to interdisciplinarians, themselves constitute just such “civic learning” as can help to keep life civil, even amidst the argumentation so characteristic of our complex times (like argumentation on abortion, the example he adduces).

Newell ends his article with a clarion call to “interdisciplinarians to play

an active role in efforts on their campus to promote civic learning.” He asks that we “[d]esign and teach interdisciplinary civic learning courses, and document the impact of [our] courses on the educational outcomes claimed in this article.” And we, the co-editors of this volume of *Issues* as we will be co-editors of the next volume, would join our voices to his. Further, we invite you to write up the results of your efforts along these lines for submission to this journal and/or for presentation at our upcoming conferences. The topic and the associated work will continue to have great value and appeal.

Pauline Gagnon  
Chair and Professor of the Department of Theatre  
College of Arts and Humanities  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, Georgia, USA

Gretchen Schulz, Professor Emerita of English  
Oxford College of Emory University  
Oxford, Georgia, USA