

**Florida Atlantic University
College of Arts and Letters
Interdisciplinary Studies
Program Review
February 26-27, 2019**

Review Team

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OVERVIEW

On February 26-27, 2019, the team of Dr. Khadijah O. Miller, Dr. Evan Widders, and Dr. Evonne Rezler reviewed FAU's Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) program, in the College of Arts and Letters at FAU. Dr. Barclay Barrios, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies, College of Arts and Letters, provided the reviewers with a self-study and associated documentation for the program. Dr. Barrios also provided a detailed itinerary and exemplary logistical support. During the site visit the review team met with:

- Ed Pratt, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
- Russell Ivy, Senior Associate Provost for Programs and Assessment
- Barclay Barrios, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, College of Arts and Letters
- Michael Horswell, Dean, College of Arts and Letters
- Stephanie Flint and Priscilla Renta, Comparative PhD students and GTA instructors in the BA IDS program
- Adam Bradford, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, College of Arts and Letters
- One student from the BA IDS program
- Debra Szabo, Assistant Director, Programs and Assessment, Provost's Office
- Jennifer Blythe, Director, Internships and Co-ops, FAU Career Center, and instructor of the IDS 3949 internship course

The BA in Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) is an undergraduate degree program that offers students a flexible curriculum. To date, it has mainly served as a degree completion program and alternative to the Bachelor of General Studies (BGS) program. Students generally switch into the IDS program during their rising junior or senior year at FAU.

Prior to the Academic Program Review (APR) site visit, the review team was provided with an APR self-study document for the IDS program. During the site visit, the review team requested and received additional information, including FAU's Strategic Plan, College of Arts and Letters Strategic Plan, and

the syllabus and ancillary materials for IDS 4930 course: Special Topics Monsters in Literature, Film and Psychology. The review team also received a copy of a memo (dated 1-25-2019) from Dean Horswell to the Provost regarding the creation of a School of Interdisciplinary Studies in the college. The review team noted that the self-study document did not fully address the imminent formation of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies or include sufficient information regarding the content of the two required courses in the IDS program.

During the site visit, the review team was impressed with: 1) the openness of all participants interviewed, 2) the quality of the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) teaching the compulsory course in the IDS program, 3) the intentionality and maturity of the undergraduate student whom the review team interviewed, 4) the realistic and cohesive plan for the School of Interdisciplinary Studies encompassing the BA IDS and a number of other related interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programs and initiatives while optimizing and coordinating scarce resources, 5) the potential for online growth in the program, especially to attract both new students and those who may leave the university, and 6) the opportunity to attract adult students on the Davie campus by marketing the IDS program on that campus/online.

The review team was asked to deliver recommendations for identified areas of concern and potential opportunities in the IDS program, with particular attention paid to curriculum, enrollment, and resources. These areas of concern and opportunities were identified through four questions for the reviewers listed in the APR self-study, and were also articulated by participants interviewed by the review team during the APR site visit. This document provides a collective review of the IDS APR self-study and site visit.

Recommendations

Curriculum Recommendations:

The review team appreciates the efforts since the IDS programs last review, particularly the creation of two required courses, HUM 3890 and IDS 3949 required for all majors. Still, curriculum in the IDS program is an area in need of growth and development. Areas of weakness include learning outcomes, readings, and required course structures. Although an area of weakness, there is great opportunity for improvement and development. The field of interdisciplinary studies is replete with literature, theories, research methods, best practices, sample syllabi and curricular models that can be utilized as a resource to develop the curriculum of the IDS program. The review team recommends the implementation of at least two new required courses—one at the beginning and at least one at the end, along with a restructured IDS 3949 (internship course) that can be intentionalized for IDS study, assessment, and learning. A foundations or principles of interdisciplinary studies course is needed—this can be a restructured HUM 3890 (with a changed IDS id/#); the team recommends a review of the IDS literature by William Newell, Allen F. Repko, Rick Szostak, Tanya Augsborg and others. This course would establish a coherent definition of interdisciplinary studies and address specific learning outcomes that reflect the established (yet growing) canon of IDS literature. Further a course on theory and/or integrative research methods is recommended to strengthen the curriculum, creating alignments and coherency within the program so that

students would not only know what interdisciplinary studies is, but how it is used *via* research, to solve complex problems and for their post-graduation goals.

An additional opportunity through the use of curriculum is to create an Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course as a potential part of the Intellectual Foundations Program (IFP) for undecided students. This course can serve as a feeder of students into the program sooner than later (as indicated in the self-study report). In the Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course students would learn more about the disciplines and disciplinary options, while the revamped HUM 3890 course (with a changed IDS id#), would speak to the foundations, principles and other disciplinary aspects for majors.

Clarification is needed on the role of the current various courses associated with the program: HUM 3949, IDS 4930 (special topics?), IDS 3890 (interdisciplinary seminar); IDS 3949 (internship course). Which are the two required? What is the order, if any, students should take these courses? Students should be provided with a recommended order. In addition, the review team recommends that the possibility of co-requisite courses be considered, this would create alignment and intentionality in the current curriculum.

The review team recommends clarification and more deliberate/targeted choice of IDS readings in the above listed, non-internship, courses—readings that are on interdisciplinarity and the process of interdisciplinary studies as a curriculum, theory, research method and concept are recommended. Specific readings include: Rick Szostak's *Introduction to IDS* (2013), William Newell's *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2008), and Allen Repko's *Interdisciplinary Research* (2016).

Assessment Recommendations:

Assessment of the IDS program is not clearly defined or presented. We recommend a review and reduction of course learning objectives that can be assessed in the intro/early IDS course, and then again in the theory and/or research methods IDS course. Recommendations also include review and consideration of the AAC&U Integrative VALUE rubric to assess programmatic goals as well as course learning objectives. The AAC&U VALUE rubrics are designed generally so that institutions may adapt them to their particular student bodies as well as institutional goals. Additionally, after speaking with Jennifer Blythe from the Career Center, there are opportunities for assessment to be gathered from the IDS 3949 (internship course). With a revised curriculum, implementation of truly interdisciplinary foundation courses with alignment to the AAC&U VALUE, assessment can be instituted and sustained.

Resources Recommendations:

The main resource needed is human capital—a dedicated staff—director and administrative support.

Faculty Recommendations:

While Associate Dean Barrios is an able overseer, there is a challenge not having dedicated faculty. However, teaching faculty can be gleaned from the PhD students in the Comparative Studies PhD program—they are already being utilized to teach the HUM course. The two PhD students we spoke with

were well qualified and dedicated. With additional, specific IDS training, the lack of faculty can be addressed by this strategic use of the PhD students in the Comparative Studies program.

Research Recommendations:

The IDS program does not oversee the research agenda of any faculty member. The review team did feel that the Graduate Assistants from the PhD Program in Comparative Studies who teach the required HUM 3949 course would benefit from attending the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies conference or at least developing a familiarity with current literature in the pedagogy and theory of interdisciplinary studies.

Program Evaluation Recommendations:

The self-study concluded with four questions which were addressed by the review team:

1. How do we (and should we) recruit students into the major as a first choice option?

The review team felt that the IDS program should take advantage of its flexible curriculum to create a dual structure that will enable it to remain a completion degree, and become a degree of first choice for students. Students who wish to use the IDS degree as a completion option, and who enter the major as rising juniors or seniors, should be required to take only six mandatory IDS program credits before graduation. However, providing new IDS course options, such as an Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies course in FAU's Intellectual Foundations Program (IFP) for undeclared students, and encouraging University Advising Services (UAS) to advocate for the degree earlier should encourage underclassmen to view the IDS degree as a viable option. With the additional coursework discussed above, the IDS degree could be an attractive option for students who desire a flexible yet unified major. Additionally, the development of the online program can serve as an excellent recruiting tool to tap the growing undergraduate student population of non-traditional, adult and returning students who select IDS as their entry major of choice.

2. How do we negotiate resources to sustain and develop the delivery of the major?

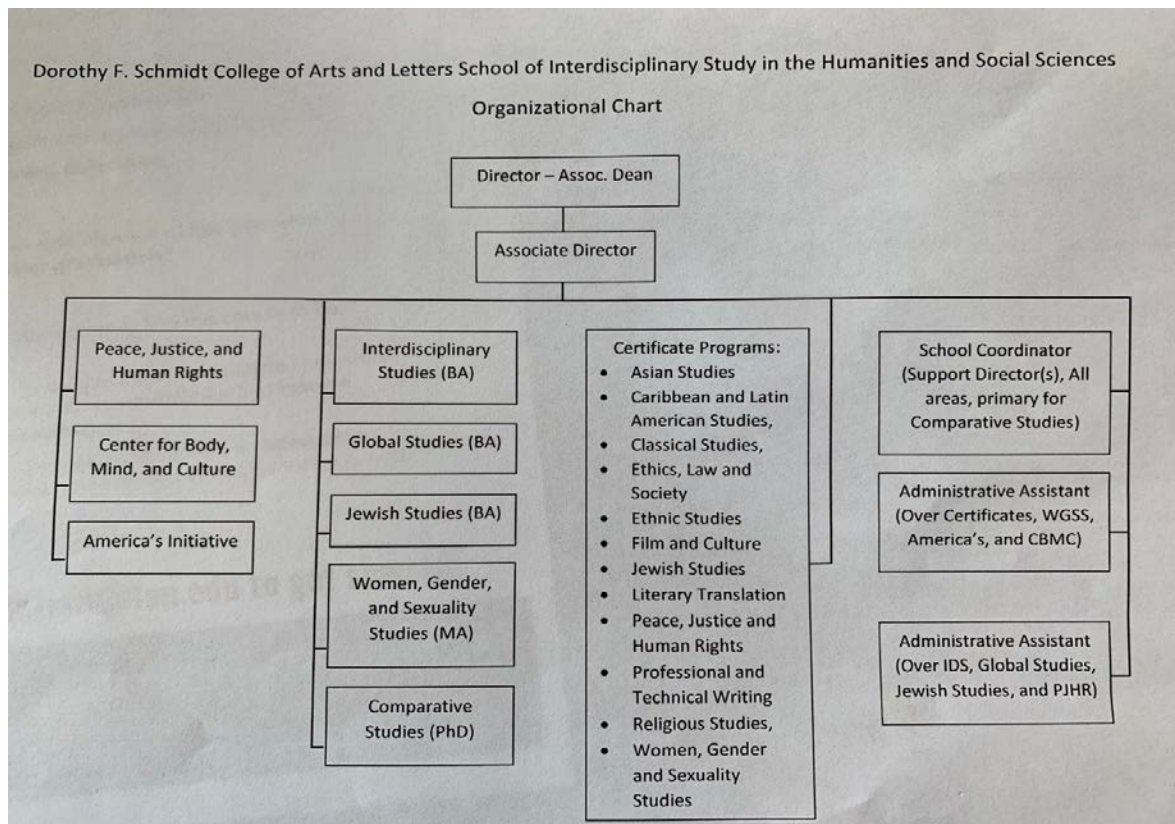
The IDS program should formulate a detailed explanation of how it serves the University Strategic Plan, the College Strategic Plan, and assists in the meeting of state-mandated metrics and FAU's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). While the IDS program is clearly serving these University imperatives, it does not seem to have developed a plan to advocate for its importance. By better integrating the program into the strategic vision of the University, additional resources might be made available. Additionally, as the IDS program takes advantage of its positioning as an online completion degree, it should be able to leverage additional enrollments in online course work by recruiting at-risk or stopped out students to make a case for additional resources from the Dean's office.

3. What courses should we develop for the major? What's missing?

As outlined above, the IDS major needs a common introductory course (Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies), taken in the student's first or second semester in the program, which can be used to develop cohorts, provide students with a basic understanding of the major, and collect data as a baseline for subsequent assessment of student learning. For student cohorts who join the major as underclassmen, best practices in Interdisciplinary pedagogy generally include a Principle or Foundation of Interdisciplinary Studies course, and then a Research Methodologies course. The pre-existing IDS capstone and internship courses would then serve to put these theoretical foundations into practice through experiential learning and a summative academic project. These courses would serve the dual degree structure of Interdisciplinary Studies and provide further assessment data. Completion students would take the introductory and capstone course, while students who entered the major earlier would pursue the structured curriculum of an intentionalized Interdisciplinary Studies degree.

4. What sort of governance structure would be most effective for the major?

The review team had a number of concerns regarding the lack of governance for the IDS program. The self-study revealed that ownership of the program was relegated to a single person, Associate Dean Barclay Barrios, who has a number of other duties in addition to running the IDS program. The lack of a dedicated director or faculty in a program that graduates over 100 students a year, has inevitably led to partial curricular reforms and difficulties in pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. However, Associate Dean Adam Bradford has proposed a new School of Interdisciplinary Studies which, if enacted, should clarify the governance of the program:



This new organization has been tentatively approved by the Dean and Provost, and is currently awaiting the review by the College Faculty Assembly. The new umbrella structure would address a number of issues of concern for the review team. It would provide ownership for the program under the director and associate director, allowing for more efficient development of recruiting, advising, curriculum, and online course modalities. The new structure would also encourage the IDS program to create synergistic relationships with pre-existing certificate, other baccalaureate, and graduate programs. This would allow the IDS program to further leverage and capitalize on the instructor resources available from Graduate Assistants in the Comparative Studies PhD program.

The review team also suggests that the IDS program form an executive or oversight committee from faculty stakeholders to better guide the day-to-day development and expansion of this program. Suggested faculty stakeholders could be the faculty who teach the concentration area courses as well as faculty from the programs within the School of Interdisciplinary Studies.

General Recommendations:

The development of the School of Interdisciplinary Studies is an excellent opportunity and area of growth for the IDS program. We suggest the creation of an oversight committee with faculty who teach in the “studies” offered at FAU—Jewish, Women & Gender, *et al.* This team of vested faculty members in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies would provide strategic direction for the programs constituting the

school as well as expertise in assessment and curriculum and design. Additionally, they can serve as faculty mentors to the major (as faculty in traditional majors serve students).

The IDS program should begin to leverage its online presence to counter the availability of the BGS degree, and provide an added value completion degree for students. Due to the flexible curriculum of IDS, which draws on coursework both within and external to the College of Arts and Letters, it should be able to add new online options without having to undertake responsibility for the development of the majority of the online coursework. It should also be well positioned to recruit online students who are place-bound, who need to leave campus for some reason (such as a job, military service, or family obligations), or who are considering the Davie campus. To take advantage of these opportunities, the IDS will need an improved governance structure, such as that discussed above, so that an individual can be tasked with marketing and streamlining the online offerings. Hiring a Graduate Assistant to assist in these recruitment duties would seem to be a logical and cost-effective strategy.

As mentioned earlier, the IDS program should tie itself clearly to the strategic goals of the university and college. Interdisciplinary learning is a powerful asset that can be used to reach any number of desired institutional outcomes. A thorough curricular and post-graduation assessment program would help to provide evidence of the program's value to stakeholders.

Conclusion:

Overall, the review team recognizes and applauds the progress and changes in the IDS since its last review. Further, the team recognizes the challenges experienced by the IDS program and its positive response to such challenges. The team agrees with the College of Arts and Letters support of the IDS program in lieu of the BGS degree. Research studies have shown that the generality, and lack of cohesive curricular structure of BGS degrees are not favorably received by students nor their parents. This presents as an opportunity for the IDS program to provide a more structured, coherent degree plan and curriculum that stresses integration and core skills needed of college graduates. The program is positioned to further develop this opportunity with the recommendations of the committee and with the support of the administration met during the visit. The IDS program in the College of Arts and Letters can position itself as a 21st century leader in integrative thinking, learning and online education at FAU.