

12-5-2008

# Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs Report

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/uprovo\\_rpts](http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/uprovo_rpts)

---

## Recommended Citation

"Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs Report" (2008). *University Provost Reports*. 9.  
[http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/uprovo\\_rpts/9](http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/uprovo_rpts/9)

# **TASK FORCE ON INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS REPORT**

**DECEMBER 5, 2008**

## **Introduction**

The Task Force on Interdisciplinary Programs was created in spring 2008 by Ronald Taylor, Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs, to advise him and the Provost on “how best to optimize the strengths and contributions of interdisciplinary programs to the academic mission of our university,” especially “the institutes and programs that report to [the Office of Multicultural and International Affairs] because as these programs develop majors, graduate courses of study, common research agendas ... they are discouraged by the additional layers that are required within the current departmental structure as opposed to an interdisciplinary approach that would enhance the significant contribution that collaborative work can make.” In summary, the Vice Provost asked for “advice on how to create a structure that supports interdisciplinary efforts at the university and one that can be effectively integrated in the academic structure in a manner consistent with the shared sentiments, vision, and aspirations of faculty interested in collaborative work across departments.”

The Task Force held one organizational meeting in spring 2008 and began meeting weekly during the fall 2008 semester. Although our charge was to consider general as well as specific issues concerning interdisciplinary programs, we devoted most of our discussion to the specific task of proposing a new administrative arrangement for the academic institutes and programs that had been reporting to OMIA (the multicultural institutes, women’s studies, international area studies, and the UNESCO chair/institute). The urgency of this task resulted from the Provost’s decision to discontinue the position of Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs and the Office for Multicultural and International Affairs after December 31, 2008. The Task Force also discussed some of the difficulties interdisciplinary programs currently face.

## **Institutes and Programs**

The Office of Multicultural and International Affairs currently houses the following academic programs: the Institute for African American Studies, the Asian American Studies Institute, the Institute for Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, the Women’s Studies Program, the International academic programs (Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, European Studies, India Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and a few other small programs), and the UNESCO Chair/Institute for Comparative Human Rights. Each of these programs combines academic, programmatic, and social justice activities to varying degrees. Some are organized around joint appointments with academic departments; others rely on affiliated faculty. Most have at least a minor; some have an undergraduate major, graduate certificate, or graduate MA degree. (See appendix I for further information on these programs.)

## **Task Force Recommendations**

The Task Force recommends that a new “Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies” (IDEGS) be created January 1, 2009. The new Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies will constitute a federation of the Institute for African American Studies, the Institute for Asian American Studies, the Institute for Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, the Women’s Studies Program, and the UNESCO Chair/Institute for Comparative Human Rights. Each Institute/Program will continue to have its own Director, all of whom will report to a new Executive Director, who in turn will report to the Provost’s office and represent the interests of all of the Institutes/Programs. All existing faculty lines, staff positions, and program support will continue as presently budgeted under OMIA. Future adjustments and new positions will be negotiated with the Provost’s office via the Executive Director. The new Institute will agree to draft an Academic Plan by October 1, 2009, containing a mission statement and metrics. A new website, with links to all of the Institutes/Program’s websites will be designed.

IDEGS will not include the International programs. The latter will remain within the Office for International Affairs, which will report to the Vice Provost for International Affairs when that individual is hired (and Vice Provost Veronica Makowsky in the interim). The rationale for housing the international programs separately is primarily that they differ structurally from the Institutes/Programs, in not presently being able to fund joint hires with schools and departments, and because a number of their affiliated faculty members prefer this location. This was also the recommendation of the Provost’s International Task Force Report. However, we envision significant collaborative activities between member institutes of IDEGS and the academic programs of International Affairs.

The Task Force is aware that some of the components of IDEGS, particularly the Institute for African American Studies and the Women’s Studies Program, intend to seek department status under the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Both IAAS and WSP recognize that this would be a developmental process that might take some time to complete. We feel that should CLAS departments develop out of programs in the new Institute, it would not weaken its mission, as continued joint academic and programming activities could easily continue.

### **The Executive Director**

The position of Executive Director should be a half-time appointment, with a 10-month salary, and will be appointed by the Provost for an initial period of five semesters (January 2009 to June 2011). (Nominations will be submitted directly to the Provost’s office.) Ideally the Executive Director should be a faculty member already involved in one of the Institutes/Programs who has the experience and vision to develop interdisciplinary collaborations among them. Should the individual appointed as the

Executive Director be a current Director of a member Institute, an Associate Director would be appointed to head that Institute during the Executive Director's tenure. Should the Executive Director's academic appointment be wholly within an academic department, that department will receive appropriate compensation for the half-time duties required, in the same manner that departments of Directors of the component Institutes/Programs are compensated. The Executive Director, while representing the interests of the component Institutes/Programs with the Provost, should maintain a fluid communication with the institute Directors and should support flexible interrelations with all Institute faculty. The Executive Director should respect programmatic and academic autonomy among the component Institutes/Programs while organizing seminars and reading groups, conferences, and curricular innovations across its units.

### **Rationale for Creating the Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies**

The new Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies is proposed as a crossroads for collaborative initiatives between departments, schools and colleges. The new Institute's Executive Director should be tasked with fostering interdisciplinary research at the intersection of questions about ethno-racial and gender diversity, transnational identity, and the nature of "the international." Such research underpins the University's Academic Plan "Our World" theme which "emphasizes the need ... to prepare our students for work and personal success as participants in an internationalized economy and an increasingly diverse society." Over the course of the Task Force's consultations with Institute faculty (through two town meetings and within the Institutes/Programs), a need and interest was identified by many for expanding dialogue and avenues of cooperation among the Institutes. We envision the reorganization of the component Institutes/Programs as an opportunity to identify and develop overlapping research initiatives, coordinate curricular innovations, and foster new communities of critical scholarship through increased collaboration between and beyond the Institutes/Programs. Such collaboration could enhance the diversity and expansion of undergraduate and graduate education, faculty research agendas, and conferences that complement each Institute/Program's annual conference and support interdisciplinary curriculum development and research collaborations. An inter-institute dialogue on these lines has begun as one outcome of this Task Force's work. It is a matter of urgency that the Executive Director of the new Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies continue and institutionalize this inter-institute dialogue.

The creation of IDEGS in a prominent position in the University and as a space for existing faculty research clusters to engage in dialogue and shared intellectual projects in turn creates the opportunity for discourse and activities which encourage and shape initiatives elsewhere in the University. IDEGS as a UConn *agora* for public discussion of diversity and global citizenship creates a number of possibilities for change over the next few years. The new Institute will:

- a. Create a focus on interdisciplinary academic programs especially those with diversity programming.

- b. Develop collaborative innovations that are attractive to external foundation and grant support.
- c. Give visibility to academic transnational, gender, and multicultural programs and faculty initiatives in all colleges and schools.
- d. Continue to hire faculty through joint appointments between the component Institutes/Programs and existing Departments to enhance diversity/multicultural education throughout the University.
- e. Foster collaborative teaching and research across institutes, with international area programs, and across colleges.
- f. Work in concert with other campus units to enhance social justice and human rights education and programming university-wide.
- g. Provide a vehicle to recruit and retain faculty in the interdisciplinary areas of the component institutes/programs.

Modeled on the recommendations of the reports, *Globalizing Knowledge* (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 1999) and *At Home in the World* (American Council on Education, 2007), the Task Force also endorses the aim of building collaborations between the IDEGS and International area studies programs. One way forward for internationalizing our curriculum should be to diminish institutional barriers between international and multicultural studies through initiatives that “bring international themes home” by examining links between the wider world and diverse U.S. populations and socioeconomic dynamics. Without reducing the study of human diversity in the U.S. to international influences alone, present scholarly trends affirm the value of “transnational” and “intercultural” frames of research and teaching, which transcend old barriers between U.S. ethnic and international studies. These trends are already represented in the work of UConn faculty and graduate students. Thus the Task Force envisions and encourages significant collaborative activities between member Institutes/Programs and the academic programs of International Affairs by co-sponsoring faculty seminars, conferences, curricula, and outreach programs. For example we support the future effort of the Institute for Puerto Rican and Latino Studies and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies to develop joint curricular initiatives, especially with regard to the LAMS major and the Latin American Studies MA program. Similarly Asian American Studies and India Studies share curriculum and faculty.

### **The Challenges of Interdisciplinary Work**

The original charge to the Task Force was to consider how best to foster interdisciplinary and collaborative research, teaching, and programmatic activities across the traditional departmental structure of the university. Faculty who do interdisciplinary work have found the structures of the university often to be prohibitive rather than facilitative. Many funding agencies today are looking for an interdisciplinary approach in response to their requests for proposals because solving contemporary issues requires expertise from a variety of content areas. Interdisciplinary work is often

more difficult because of the additional layers of administration that are required within the current departmental structure.

The broad mission of the Office of Multicultural and International Affairs was unique to most university structures in that it was required to cross academic (Institutes), student affairs (cultural centers), and administrative (ODE) silos. The restructuring of OMIA has removed two of the silos and allows a new “Institutes” structure to focus only on the academic arena. Institute faculty members, however, have to cross traditional academic silos by reporting both to an Institute Director and to a Department Head. Faculty are asked to fulfill all the traditional roles (teaching, research, and service) for two units sometimes doubling their commitment yet frustrating their “home” Department by focusing on work that may not be considered “prestigious” in their content area. We need to find ways to fully support interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaching, scholarship, and research. The current mechanisms are sometimes inadequate.

Several specific areas of concern continually arise with regard to the faculty who hold joint appointments between an Institute/Program and a traditional Department. These concerns relate to the PTR process, Merit awards, faculty commitments to both a Department and an Institute/Program, and curricular innovation.

### PTR

With regard to PTR, the current system calls for the Department Head of the “home” Department to ask the Institute/Program Director to write a letter for the faculty member’s PTR file. This process is more-or-less followed by departments. However, some faculty members have felt disadvantaged by the current procedures, since the nature of their scholarly work, teaching, and service may differ from that of many members of the home Department. (For example, the top journals in an interdisciplinary field may be less familiar to members of the home Department.) A letter from the Director has not always been sufficient to mitigate difficulties that have resulted, which could more easily be addressed through a process that would involve the Institute/Program Director more directly in PTR review. The Task Force would like to recommend that procedures be developed and implemented that would give a 50% voice for the Institute/Program in the Department’s PTR deliberations. For example, the appropriate Institute/Director and Institute members could become part of the PTR review committee in the home Department. There would be positive benefits for both the Department and the Institute/Program with such a system. The advantages would be that faculty members would have a better sense that their records have been adequately reviewed, and the home Department’s PTR committee would be better able to evaluate the record of the faculty member under discussion. However, the requirements for reappointment, tenure, and promotion would be the same as for all other faculty members of the home Department. Faculty members who are jointly appointed should not be disadvantaged by having to fulfill PTR requirements for two programs.

Merit

The Merit award situation is less straightforward. On the one hand, merit pay could be determined by having the Department recommend 50% of the award and the Institute/Program the other 50%. However, in practice, this puts the individual faculty member at a disadvantage, since the total merit pool of each Institute/Program is relatively small. Because of this, Merit awards have been determined by the home Department. But here again, a more transparent process for involving the Director of the faculty member's Institute/Program would be helpful. We recommend that, in addition to the Department Head's asking for a letter from the Director of the Institute/Program there be a substantive conversation between the two before the final Merit recommendation is made.

Joint commitments

The Task Force recommends that a Memo of Understanding be developed for all joint hires between Departments and member Institutes/Programs of IDEGS. Such an MOU exists for several appointments and should be expanded to include all faculty. In particular, both the Department and the Institute/Program should acknowledge that teaching and service requirements are to be split between the two entities, and thus reduced in the home Department.

Curricular innovation

Institute faculty have encountered difficulty in getting innovative, interdisciplinary courses approved by the colleges' curriculum and courses committees. We recommend that the Provost and/or appropriate Deans encourage their C & C committees to broaden their curricular horizons when considering approvals for interdisciplinary courses. The new University Interdisciplinary Courses Committee may be able to play a role here.

By recommending the new Institutes for Diaspora, Ethnicity, and Gender Studies and by calling attention to the above impediments to interdisciplinary work, the Task Force has addressed and, hopefully, fulfilled the charge "to optimize the strengths and contributions of interdisciplinary programs to the academic mission of our university."

**Task Force members**

Shirley A. Roe, Professor and Department Head, History Department (chair)

Manisha Desai, Director, Women's Studies Program; Associate Professor, Sociology Department

Margaret Lamb, Program Director, Individualized and Interdisciplinary Studies

Cathleen T. Love, Associate Vice Provost, Office of Multicultural and International

Affairs; Interim Director, Asian American Studies Institute; Professor, Department of Extension

Elizabeth Mahan, Interim Executive Director, Office for International Affairs

Samuel Martinez, Associate Professor, Anthropology Department

Jeffrey Ogbar, Director, Institute for African American Studies; Associate Professor,  
History Department

Amii Omara-Otunnu, UNESCO Chair in Comparative Human Rights; Executive Director,  
Institute for Comparative Human Rights

Mark Overmyer-Velazquez, Interim Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean  
Studies; Associate Professor, History Department

Cyrus Zirakzadeh, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; Professor,  
Political Science Department



## **APPENDIX I. DESCRIPTIONS OF COMPONENT INSTITUTES/PROGRAMS**

### **Institute for African American Studies**

Formed in 1989, the Institute for African American Studies (IAAS) is an inter-disciplinary program of study that seeks, through the humanities, social sciences, and the arts, to explore key aspects of the experience of the African Diaspora in a systematic and structurally integrated fashion. Having grown from the Black Studies Program, which was founded in 1969, the IAAS offers a minor, and major in African American Studies, and has 11 joint-faculty members in the Departments of Art and Art History, Dramatic Arts, English, History, Music, Political Science, Psychology and Sociology. There are also a Director, program manager, two graduate workers and two undergraduate student workers who perform the many functions of the Institute, which, over the past nineteen years, have included hosting a wide range of academic programs and speakers from world-renown scholars such as Cornel West and William J. Wilson to many raising stars of the academy. Additionally, the Institute has hosted symposia, three national conferences, attracting hundreds of participants from around the country, as well as some international visitors.

The Institute for African American Studies' broad educational purposes engender among all students an intellectual appreciation of black life, with a focus on the United States; enrich the University of Connecticut's curriculum; and increase the relevance of the UConn education to a culturally diverse world. The Institute strives to enhance understanding of Africa and its Diaspora in order to maximize knowledge and possibilities for racial harmony, and social justice through the major in African American Studies. Indeed, the Institute is undergirded by the belief that in order to be able to undertake any kind of meaningful scholarly contribution towards African American people, be it in the Arts, Psychology, History, Sociology, Geography, English, Philosophy or Religion, it is imperative to have a strong background in African American Studies (AAS). Moreover, AAS provides important context to discussions and academic work around important issues of race, class, gender and diversity in the United States and beyond.

Finally, the program of the Institute for African American Studies complements the university's mission and Academic Plan. In particular, it adds to those clauses that assume a special responsibility for teaching students about politics, history and culture in a diverse global community. It also encourages students to appreciate the ideals of equality, humanistic values and democracy, and to teach students to think critically and logically. In the Provost Office, IAAS will be anchored in already collaborating units: Asian American Studies, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, and Women's Studies. We aspire to ultimately become a Department within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

## **Asian American Studies Institute**

Founded in 1993, the Asian American Studies Institute is a leading East Coast multidisciplinary research and teaching program that reflects the heterogeneity of both Asian American Studies and Asian America. Although the primary focus of the Institute is upon experiences of people of Asian ancestry in America, attention is also given to the study of Asia, since Asia informs the Asian American experience. This transnational orientation is reflected through the institute's research initiatives, teaching, and community outreach. The Institute encourages students to explore the ways in which race, gender, and class are shaped through immigration histories, social inequalities, changing global dynamics, and shifting border politics. The Asian American Studies Institute fosters scholarly initiatives on human rights, community identity formation, and the arts through interdisciplinary engagements and collaborations.

The Asian American Studies Institute has four core faculty and two courtesy appointments. The AASI currently has an Interim Director appointed by the Vice Provost until a new Director is hired which will add another faculty member to the core faculty. In addition, the Institute has adjunct faculty who teach at the Waterbury, Stamford and Torrington Campuses. The Institute offers a minor in Asian American Studies and cross-lists courses with several departments. The Asian American Studies Institute has nationally recognized holdings on the Japanese American Internment and the Fred Ho collection. In addition, national conferences such as the East of California conference have been held at the University of CT. as well as first ever conferences in the U.S. like the Conference on history and politics of Filipino Americans and on Nepali Women. Our commitment to the communities we serve has led to external support for events such as the Nazrul Conference and the Day of Remembrance Lecture. The Institute also has a Memorandum of Understanding with Visva Bharati, the university founded by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The MOU began following the success of an interdisciplinary conference on Tagore sponsored by AASI and attended by scholars from 40 universities in six countries from diverse fields. There has been an exchange of scholars between the two universities over the past ten years.

## **Institute of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies**

The Institute of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies (PRLS) advances interdisciplinary research and teaching related to Puerto Ricans and Latin@s, and pursues engaged intellectual work and social advancement. Acknowledging the heterogeneous quality of US Latinas/os, PRLS supports a transnational and intersectional research framework, and critically studies culture, society, and identity. PRLS has six joint faculty positions with five departments: Modern and Classical Languages (2), Curriculum and Instruction (Neag), Communications, Human Development and Family Studies, and Political Science (PRLS pays the full salary of three of its faculty members; joint faculty teach cross-listed courses in their departments and perform most of their institutional service there). With the support of sixteen faculty associates in various departments and schools, PRLS sponsors an undergraduate

minor, fifteen courses, and numerous academic programs, including one yearly colloquium. PRLS is also part of the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (together with twenty-five nationally recognized research centers).

### **Women's Studies Program**

Since its founding in 1974, the Women's Studies Program (to be renamed the Women's, Gender and Sexualities Studies Program, WGS) has been engaged in precisely the kinds of interdisciplinary, cross-divisional, campus-wide collaborative scholarly and teaching projects that the central administration proposes in the 2008 Academic Plan. The Program functions as a hub for feminist scholarship, connecting different constituencies and activities across campus and off-campus communities through critical analysis of gender, the pursuit of knowledge about women, and commitment to gender equality. Gender is within the WGS faculty and students' approach the study of gender through intersectional analyses of race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, nation, and religion, which expands the epistemic and material possibilities of WGS as a field of study and political practice. Consequently, WGS addresses research and curricular interests of a wide cross section of the student body and speaks to the overlapping interests of faculty in other interdisciplinary units including African America Studies, Puerto Rican/Latin@ Studies, Asian American Studies, the Human Rights Institute and International Studies

WGS offers an undergraduate major, minor, and a graduate certificate. Our current numbers reflect an upward trend with 13 majors and 43 minors graduated in the academic year (AY) 2007-08 to 34 majors and 51 minors declared for AY 2008-09; 9 graduate certificates were awarded in AY 07-08 with 22 students currently pursuing the certificate; and 2073 students enrolled in 34 WS courses (accounting for 109 sections) in AY 07-08. The growth and dynamism within our own program and of the field more generally will enable us to provide our students with three focused concentrations: transnational feminisms, sexualities, and science, health and technology. The interdisciplinary reach of WSG and its attention to international, human rights, science, health, and technology coincides with many of the foci emphasized in the University's Academic Plan.

In addition, we are pursuing possibilities of a joint Masters program between WS and German Studies and with professional schools namely Social Work, Nursing, Education, and Business. We envision the reorganization of academic units of OMIA as an opportunity to further develop innovative curriculum and critical communities through increased collaboration with African American Studies, Puerto Rican/Latin@ Studies, Asian American Studies, and International Studies. Such collaboration could enhance the diversity and expansion of undergraduate and graduate education, faculty research agendas, and conferences that complement our annual women's studies conference as well as complement our efforts to enhance interdisciplinary curriculum development and research collaborations.

This interdisciplinary reach of WGS is made possible through the efforts of our 7-core faculty and over 12 affiliated faculty from Anthropology, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Communication, English, Fine Arts, History, HDFS, Human Rights, India Studies, Latin American Studies, Modern and Classical Languages, Philosophy, Psychology, Political Science, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, Sociology, and Social Work. Core faculty include two whose appointments place them fully in WGS, four who have joint appointments with Art History, English, Political Science, and Sociology, one faculty who is 25% in WS and 75% in Anthropology, and a former director whose appointment is in Psychology. Our faculty, students, and staff aspire to be one of the top ranked programs in the country when the National Research Council begins rating Women's Studies Programs in 2015. Given the Program's overall strength, upwards momentum, and fulfillment of the goals set by the Academic Plan, WGS is well positioned to further the University's efforts to become one of the top research universities in the country.

### **UNESCO Chair/Institute in Comparative Human Rights**

In May 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) awarded the University of Connecticut the first UNESCO Chair in Human Rights in the United States of America. The Chair joined a network of 52 UNESCO Chairs around the world, which was founded in 1992 to promote human rights through education and research and to encourage collaboration among institutions of higher learning.

Through the agreement with UNESCO, the Chair in Comparative Human Rights is mandated to:

- Promote an integrated system of research, education, training, information, and documentation in the field of human rights;
- Facilitate collaboration between high-level internationally recognized researchers and teaching staff of the University and other institutions in the United States and other countries, particularly South Africa;
- Disseminate the results of research in the field of human rights.

The Chair, in working to realize a vision of a shared common humanity, is guided by three inter-related clusters of principles that, if put into practice, will contribute significantly to the building of a global culture based on human rights. These principles are:

- The equality, dignity and freedom of all people;
- Reciprocal respect for the dignity and rights of all people;
- The universality, indivisibility, and interdependence of all human rights.

Based on these principles, the Chair has developed an inclusive approach to human rights known as comparative human rights, which seeks to transcend the ethnocentrism

of human rights dialogue and unify various concepts and practices of human rights through integrated inter-disciplinary and cross-regional inquiry.

The mandate of UNESCO is implemented through initiatives undertaken by the Institute of Comparative Human Rights, operating under the aegis of the UNESCO Chair.

The Chair collaborates with institutions all over the world, but focuses primarily on South Africa. This is due to the privileged relationships the Chairholder has already nurtured between the University of Connecticut and a number of South African institutions, including the African National Congress, the University of Fort Hare, and the UNESCO “Oliver Tambo” Chair of Human Rights at Fort Hare. These partnerships were a major factor in the University’s decision to designate human rights education and research as institutional priorities, and in the award of the UNESCO Chair to the University of Connecticut.