



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA WILMINGTON

MEMORANDUM

TO: Faculty and Staff in the Division of Academic Affairs

FR: Dr. James Winebrake, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Dr. Nathan Grove, President of Faculty Senate

RE: Establishing the *Ad hoc Task Force on Creating and Facilitating Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research*

DT: February 4, 2021

Purpose This memo establishes a *UNCW Task Force on Creating and Facilitating Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research* (herein, the “Task Force”). This Task Force is jointly established and charged by the Office of the Provost and the Faculty Senate.

Barriers to Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research at UNCW Solving the world’s biggest problems – whether they are across the globe or in our local communities – requires interdisciplinary thinking. Fortunately, the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship and education is deeply woven into our university’s belief system. We have been actively engaged in interdisciplinary program development and research for years.

Creating opportunities for interdisciplinary work sometimes requires disrupting traditional programmatic boundaries. As articulated in an email from the provost in October 2020, at least three key challenges at UNCW must be addressed for successful development of interdisciplinary programs and scholarship:

- (1) Determining a procedure to fairly distribute teaching credit (SCH) to units that have faculty teaching in interdisciplinary programs.^[1]
- (2) Establishing clear guidelines for how faculty engaged in interdisciplinary work will be evaluated for RTP and annual review.
- (3) Establishing clear and consistent policies across units supporting interdisciplinary programs (e.g, policies related to compensation for coordinators, curricular management, and governance).

Cultivating the opportunities with interdisciplinary teaching and research will require the development of new policies, practices, and reporting mechanisms.

^[1] The Office of Institutional Research, the Registrar, and Academic Affairs Resource Management is currently working on this new reporting, with participation from deans, associate deans, and others.

Five Ingredients of Successful Interdisciplinary Programs

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, we may not have administrative structures in place to allow interdisciplinary programs to thrive. In the previously mentioned communication from the provost, the provost suggested that successful interdisciplinary programs tend to have the following important (albeit not the “only”) ingredients:

1. Program Curriculum Committee - made up of faculty from units that offer courses and resources to deliver the program. The Program Curriculum Committee should have authority to make changes and updates to the curriculum in a transparent way. The role and rules of governance of the Program Curriculum Committee should be documented and transparent.
2. Program Director/Coordinator - someone who is the point person for the program and coordinates the day-to-day work, planning, and overall operation of the program. The Program Coordinator’s duties, expectations, and compensation should be documented and transparent.
3. Program Administrative Council - made up of unit heads (and possibly others) who have administrative authority and responsibility for the units providing courses and other resources for the interdisciplinary program; this is an especially important group for issues related to course scheduling, holding seats for students, and managing and supporting faculty workloads vis-à-vis the interdisciplinary program. The roles and responsibilities of the council should be documented and transparent.
4. Program Faculty - made up of faculty associated/affiliated with the program. These faculty can play different roles and have different levels of affiliation with the program, thereby granting them different rights and responsibilities. A governance document for each program should outline clearly and transparently how a faculty member becomes ‘program faculty’ and what those rights and responsibilities.
5. Administrative “Home” - a “place” that provides the administrative support for the program, including location of student files (if not virtual), staff support, advising support, etc. The administrative home must be resourced appropriately to provide these services. The administrative home will “house” the degree — but does not “own” the degree. The degree is jointly owned in partnership with the units and faculty who are delivering the curricula. The expectations of the administrative home and the resources needed to support it should be documented and transparent.

Establishing the Task Force

There are many potential challenges to implementing interdisciplinary degree programs – yet these programs are becoming more and more important for UNCW’s success. Reducing barriers to program implementation could allow us to be one of the most innovative, interdisciplinary schools in the nation.

Therefore, we are calling for the formation of the *Ad Hoc Task Force on Reducing Barriers to Interdisciplinary Teaching and Research*. The Task Force shall consider the above barriers and make recommendations on policies and practices we can implement to reduce these barriers, as well as other barriers that may arise during the Task Force’s deliberations. We are also asking the Task Force to make recommendations regarding how we can ensure our interdisciplinary programs are well-governed and include necessary ingredients for success.

Membership

This memo initiates a call for nominations for members of the Task Force. All faculty and staff are eligible for membership. Self-nominations are welcome. If you choose to nominate someone other than yourself, please check with that person to confirm ahead of time that they will serve. Nominations should be sent to the attention of Sharon Lindgren (lindgrens@uncw.edu) by no later than 5 pm, Friday, February 12, 2021. We will work with the deans to select 8-12 faculty and staff from the list of nominees to serve on the Task Force. We may also reach out to other divisions on campus to identify Task Force members as appropriate. We expect to have the Task Force established by February 19, and we will call an initial meeting of the Task Force shortly thereafter.

Timeline and Deliverables

The Task Force would have a report delivered by April 22, 2021. The report does not need to be extensive; it can include a set of prioritized, bulleted recommendations and or policy alternatives that UNCW should consider implementing. The report shall be shared with Academic Affairs broadly.

Conclusion

The importance of getting this “right” cannot be overstated. We must find ways to foster a culture where interdisciplinary teaching and research is celebrated and supported. We are hopeful this Task Force will start us on an appropriate course.

Please contact either of us or your dean if you have any questions or comments.

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