

Handbook for Interdisciplinary Courses

I. Definition

Interdisciplinary courses question and offer an alternative to traditional knowledge production processes in that they seek to be integrative and holistic, rather than fragmented and compartmentalized. They use an inquiry rather than a disciplinary or multi-disciplinary approach. The curricular paradigm is not one of simply combining or just using more than one discipline. Instead of relying on an additive model, these courses revision and restructure learning. Often, they are organized thematically, to facilitate the integration of information and methodologies. As Julie Thompson Klein notes in *Mapping Interdisciplinary Studies* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999), “. . . interdisciplinary study is creative and constructed rather than imitative and formulaic” (17).

II. Interdisciplinary Pedagogy

Teaching interdisciplinary courses is challenging because text books are generally disciplinary in nature. Teachers of interdisciplinary courses, as a result, have to compile their own readings making interdisciplinarity the framing mechanism, the syllabus' primary emphasis. It is useful to organize the syllabus around critical themes, which allows integration of insights from different academic disciplines.

An interdisciplinary pedagogy emphasizes the learning process (i. e., teaching as mentoring, not telling: the teacher as “guide on the side,” not “sage on the stage”). Innovative approaches include:

- promoting dialogue and community,
- promoting higher-order critical thinking,
- promoting problem solving
- being student-centered.

Methods often used include:

- team teaching,
- collaborative learning among students and with teachers,
- experiential and service-based learning,
- inquiry- and discovery-based learning.

III. Strategies for Integrating Disciplines in Courses:

- organizing courses around a topic, theme, issue, idea, problem or question
- devising courses and units that reflect on the process of integration
- using particular integrative approaches such as systems theory, feminism, and textualism
- giving students models of interdisciplinary knowledge and integrative process
- devising units that reflect on the process of integration
- requiring integrative portfolios

A Sample WCU “I” syllabus is included in this document.

See also www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/; this website has syllabi and examples.

IV. Assessment and Desired Outcomes:

Desired student learning outcomes in interdisciplinary programs include:

- greater tolerance of ambiguity and paradox
- sensitivity to ethical dimensions of issues
- ability to synthesize or integrate
- ability to demythologize experts
- humility and sensitivity to bias
- enlarged perspectives or horizons
- critical thinking and unconventional thinking
- empowerment
- creativity and original insights
- ability to balance subjective and objective thinking

V. Preparation of Proposal

In order to help the Interdisciplinary Committee in its review process and speed the review of proposed interdisciplinary courses, professors should design their syllabi to include:

- 1) A general statement describing the course's interdisciplinarity;
- 2) A specific statement on each of the three or more disciplines integrated in the course and how they are treated in the course;
- 3) A descriptive week-by-week course outline that avoids treating disciplines separately and sequentially and instead integrates knowledge and insights from disciplines (see "Integrating the Disciplines").

N. B. Disciplines that could be construed as a subset of each other may not be used to demonstrate interdisciplinarity (see "The Three Disciplines").

Guiding Questions for Proposers of Interdisciplinary-Designated Courses

- 1) How is your proposed “I” course significantly different from any other disciplinary courses offered in your department or any other department at the university?
- 2) How distinct are the three disciplines you have selected for your course? Are any of the three disciplines a subset of each other? (See “The Three Disciplines.”)
- 3) What additional materials did you research to develop this proposed “I” course? Did you research different methodological processes as well as content areas?
- 4) Please describe how the three disciplines you have chosen will work together to access the innovative domain of inquiry and knowledge formation that you will be investigating in this course. (See “Integrating the Disciplines.”)
- 5) Please describe your plan for at least one class session wherein you will address the topic of “interdisciplinarity” with your students in order to provide them with the critical thinking tools they need to reflect comparatively on the boundaries of disciplinary methods and outcomes.
- 6) Please describe how you are going to assess students’ ability to integrate the three disciplines, which includes their ability to use critical thinking skills to reflect on the boundaries of disciplinary methods and outcomes.

Definition of a Designated Interdisciplinary Course
General Education Program at West Chester University

A course is “interdisciplinary” in the sense required for satisfying the general education interdisciplinary requirement if it:

1) places its primary emphasis on the interrelationships among three or more disciplines,
and

2) employs three or more disciplines with approximately equal emphasis in the investigation of a matter (e.g., ideas, concepts, cultures) which does not itself fall within the province of an established discipline.

N.B. No course which qualifies as a distributive requirement may also qualify as an Interdisciplinary course.

CAPC minutes, 23 April 1992,
modified Spring 2001

Interdisciplinary Course

Background

Traditional academic approaches to knowledge divide learning into discrete disciplines, so that “history,” for instance, is considered the domain of the History department. In contrast, the interdisciplinary approach integrates knowledge from many disciplines. An interdisciplinary course focuses on interactive processes, borrowing, and building analogies, as well as the cross-fertilizations that occur when study in one discipline triggers new ways of thinking in other disciplines. In sum, the interdisciplinary course emphasizes connections among disciplines and integration of knowledge, themes, and ideas from different disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity is more than a question of the influence of one discipline on another; it is also a question of how knowledge from more than one discipline affects our understanding of a particular subject as well as other disciplines. Interdisciplinarity represents, “a predisposition to view all fields as potentially vulnerable to recreation in the partial image of ... others” (Giles Gunn, “Interdisciplinary Studies,” *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literature* [New York: MLA, 1992], 243.) Modes of interdisciplinary study include (but are not limited to) such as fields as cultural studies, semiotics, or women’s studies, which are themselves composite rather than unitary sites of investigation. In these areas, the disciplinary boundaries among as well as within such fields of study blur and become indistinct.

Interdisciplinarity, by this definition, recognizes that forms change, that they are unstable and incomplete. In this understanding, the process of interdisciplinary study is one of reconceiving the way we represent knowledge to ourselves and moving beyond the territorial claims of disciplinary boundaries. Interdisciplinarity represents a means of overcoming the isolation and discrete attitudes that separate areas of knowledge, to find ways boundaries can be crossed and fields integrated. By means of this approach, sociology, political science, and geography, for example, can be combined to tackle issues, such as urban problems, and to raise and address new kinds of questions that individual disciplines alone cannot successfully address.

Interrelationships among disciplines can be approached in several ways: historical overview of the interrelationship, the nature and value of interrelationship, major issues, or differentiating methodologies. For example, we may examine law in literature and literature in the law. That is, we may look at legal themes in literature and literary themes in law, at laws of literature and the literalness of law. We may investigate the implications of the interrelationships as well as the history of those interrelationships. And, we may explore how carrying the methods of one discipline over to another brings new insights to old conceptions and generates new ones.

The Three Disciplines

The three disciplines you select for your course are particularly significant, for they must be both relevant to the topic and sufficiently different to facilitate the comparable study of disciplines. Contrast is a necessary component for interdisciplinary study, since contrast reveals how each discipline focuses on some aspects of a problem even as it overlooks others. In an interdisciplinary course, the strengths and weaknesses of disciplines are themselves part of the subject matter of the study. Not only are you trying to bring three different kinds of expertise to a problem, but also you are showing how each of those perspectives has inherent limitations that can be revealed by contrast with the other two perspectives. These unexpected *disconnections* can then provide a basis for developing surprising and innovative *connections* when the disciplines are integrated in ways that direct our attention toward new methods of modeling and solving problems.

The creative tension between disciplines is lost if they are not sufficiently contrastive or relevant to the issues the course addresses. For example, an interdisciplinary course on Poverty could use Economics, Philosophy, and Sociology as its three disciplines. As you design the course, you work *as if* an Economics professor, a Philosophy professor, and a Sociology professor are on your teaching team. [It helps to consult with faculty in these fields as you prepare your materials.] Each professor will bring the specific vocabulary and methodological models of her discipline to your classroom. You will study how the conceptual models and literature of each discipline inform the subject at hand. You will also recognize how each discipline omits important aspects of the problem that one of the other disciplines includes. Each discipline's assumptions and worldview are more clearly apparent in comparison with the other two disciplines. As a result of working with these three disciplines, you will discover new ways of thinking about poverty that facilitate innovative solutions. The contributions and limitations of diverse disciplines add up to a holistic view that cannot be attained through the use of one discipline alone.

What if a professor selected the three disciplines of Biology, Philosophy, and Bioethics to study poverty? Two problems arise with this selection. First, although Biology can enhance a study of malnutrition, which is a component of poverty, it may not provide the more comprehensive input that Economics could provide. So Biology may not be as relevant as Economics. The second problem is that Bioethics itself is a subset of Philosophy and a subset of Biology, so the professor has not selected three disciplines with sufficient contrast to study the phenomenon of disciplines themselves. This course is actually composed of just two disciplines—Biology and Philosophy. But aren't there Bioethics departments at some universities? Yes. But those departments have been formed as interdisciplinary departments, aware that they are combining the fields of biology and philosophy. Departmental designation need not indicate an *established* discipline, yet the strength and weakness of established disciplines are exactly part of what we want to study in interdisciplinary courses. For an undergraduate course on "the interdisciplinary," three distinct disciplines that make a roughly equal contribution to the course enhances this kind of comprehensive, critical inquiry.

Integrating the Disciplines

Interdisciplinarity derives from the sense that objects of study exist beyond the constraints of analytical singularity and methodological rules. These objects of study require approaches that are multiple, at the same time that the course content and methods of instruction seek to ensure that these approaches overlap and intersect. What is today defined as interdisciplinary practice examines subjects that are more diffuse and multiplicitous than those that are disciplinarily conceived. But “interdisciplinarity” is not another word for pluralism. Although interdisciplinary courses draw on multiple methodologies, offering a wider scope and range of questions than disciplinary courses, they are integrative, not additive endeavors. Premised on the assumption that ultimately, the divisions of knowledge into the disciplines retains partiality rather than universality, interdisciplinary courses seek synthesis.

This is why the interdisciplinary course is generally problem- or issue-based rather than field-specific. Not only can each of the disciplines involved contribute its disciplinary premises, literature, models, and methodologies, and not only can the critical examination of each as a discipline illuminate its particular contributions and limitations, but the interplay among the three produces a holistic synthesis that leads to an entirely new paradigm, within the framework of the class. Thus, in the example of the course on poverty, drawing upon the literature and methodologies of economics, philosophy, and sociology is not enough. Each of those disciplines sheds a particular kind of light on the subject matter, but together, integrated, they present a far more holistic picture and thus offer new solutions.

The optimum result of this model is engaged, expansive, and exciting work for both students and instructors.

Interdisciplinary Course Approval Procedure

1. The proposed course must exist in the University academic database as a course.
2. Prior to preparing the proposal for an interdisciplinary course, the faculty member should consult with the Chair or a member of the Interdisciplinary Sub-Committee. A meeting should be arranged to (a) summarize the proposed course and (b) discuss how the components of the course compare with established criteria for interdisciplinary courses. The Committee member(s) will provide constructive feedback about the nature, format, requirements, and other dimensions of the course with respect to the interdisciplinary model. In addition, the proposer and committee member(s) can discuss any questions or comments about the submission and review process for proposals.
3. The course proposal should be submitted to the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs office at 25 University Avenue – Suite 001, who will distribute it to the appropriate committee.
4. The course proposal should follow the standard general education course proposal format of West Chester University and include:
 - completed interdisciplinary cover sheet/checklist;
 - completed general education cover sheet (green);
 - completed and signed course action form (yellow);
 - a narrative statement describing the three or more academic disciplines that are integrated in the course and how those disciplines are integrated;
 - a syllabus that includes:
 - interdisciplinarity in the course description and objectives,
 - readings from the three or more disciplines that reflect interdisciplinarity,
 - organization and content that reflect interdisciplinarity, and
 - assignments designed to foster student understanding of interdisciplinary approaches; and
 - a bibliography that reflects the instructor’s preparation in treating the course as interdisciplinary.

N. B. Disciplines that could be construed as a subset of each other may not be used to demonstrate interdisciplinarity (see “The Three Disciplines”).
5. Members of the Interdisciplinary Sub-Committee specifically evaluate the extent of coverage of each of the at least three disciplines identified as included in the course, as well as the success in integrating those disciplines.
6. The Interdisciplinary Sub-Committee recommends the course for interdisciplinary designation to the CAPC General Education Committee, once it has decided that the course meets the above standards.
7. The CAPC General Education Committee makes a recommendation, either to return to proposer for further revision, or to recommend its adoption with a motion at the next scheduled CAPC meeting.
8. If CAPC approves the course as an Interdisciplinary course, the CAPC secretary forwards the proposal and the CAPC recommendation to the Provost for administrative adoption and inclusion in the University database.

Following is an approved “I” Course
Statements in blue identify required information for “I” course approval

Dr. Peter Loedel (x3435; ploedel@wcupa.edu)
University
PSC 318 - 3 Units
Office: RJ106;
by appt.

West Chester

Spring 2005
Hours: MWF 10-11/12-1 & T 1-4 or

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Course Description and Objectives: IPE as an Interdisciplinary Study

Statement that describes the course’s interdisciplinary:

The primary objective of this course is to develop analytical and theoretical skills in the application of various IPE perspectives (Liberalism, Mercantilism, Marxism/Structuralism) which examine the interrelationship of **states, society, and markets**. Using these three perspectives, the student will be able to understand, evaluate and synthesize diverse historical and analytical material covering issue areas in IPE, for example, trade, money and markets, and development. Using the theme of globalization, we will examine how **state, society, and the markets** each individually and collectively shape the global system.

A course on International Political Economy seeks as its central goal to enable students to understand the functioning of the international economic, political and social systems including an appreciation of the complex interrelationships that shape such systems, their dynamic qualities, and the theoretical perspectives and analytical skills that lead to deeper understanding.

Statement on each of the three or more disciplines integrated in the course and how they are treated in the course:

International Political Economy is both the past and the future of social science. It is the past because it represents a return to the origins of social science, before the study of human social behavior became fragmented into the discrete fields. **This course reunites the fragmented fields of human social behavior: economics (the role of markets), political science (the state), and sociology (individual human behavior as influenced by societal variables such as class, gender, culture, groups, ethnicity, etc).**

Globalization is IPE and it is the future because, in today’s complex world, it is increasingly clear that most important social problems have an international aspect that is best understood through an integrated, *interdisciplinary* study that draws on a variety of tools and perspectives, not just one. IPE does not seek to replace the separate social science disciplines; it unites them, better to serve the needs of our complex society faced with the pressures of globalization.

IPE attempts to understand the world of human interaction in a comprehensive fashion. This is a very ambitious undertaking, but a necessary one for the people who live in the world and

for future political, societal and business leaders who will have to deal with its economic, political and social problems. A course such as this one is a first step toward this important goal.

IPE is necessarily an interdisciplinary study. IPE defines itself by the set of questions, issues, and problems that it addresses, not the specific method, approach, or theory that is employed or by a particular geographic region or historical period. This course will teach students to consider issues broadly, to see linkages between and among different problems, and to engage in creative and critical thinking. This course will also have a strong multicultural content with an emphasis on how values impact a range of policy issues: trade, finance, development, world hunger, overpopulation, environment, democracy, and security.

This course will have a strong dynamic element. This course will condition students to think in terms of evolutionary change and structural transformation. The ability to consider problems as a dynamic framework is an important skill for future leaders. IPE has a strong analytical component with “literacy skills” -- statistics, economics and foreign language – built into the course as well as an emphasis on writing and foreign study experience.

Assessment and desired Outcomes are defined:

There are five basic goals for the course. Upon completion of this course, students will

1. Appreciate society as an interdisciplinary, complex and varied system where people act and inter-act in many ways on several levels.
2. Understand the essential nature of society’s economic, social, and political spheres (and the theories and analytical tools appropriate to each sphere), how they connect and overlap, and how they are shaped and influenced by such variables.
3. Comprehend the complex and dynamic nature of international systems and institutions and understand the interrelationships between and among their social, political and economic elements.
4. Evaluate in detail the actual social systems of selected countries that are important in today’s world and demonstrate the ability to study, understand, and compare social, economic and political systems in other countries.
5. Understand in detail selected problems or issues of the international system that are important in today’s world and demonstrate the ability to study, understand, and analyze together important international problems or issues.
6. Synthesize a variety of perspectives and methodologies in order to develop solutions to the difficult problems and issues facing the international community, the United States, the State of Pennsylvania and the community of West Chester.

Books/Readings

The following books are required for this course:

Theodore H. Cohn, *Global Political Economy: Theory and Practice*, 2005 (3rd edition)
Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 2001

Course Procedures

The bulk of the class will be taken up with lectures, group-based exercises, and discussion. Student interaction and questioning will be encouraged. Students should feel free to ask for clarification or elaboration of any aspect of any of the material covered in the formal lectures. Students should also feel free to offer their own opinions or comments regarding the views expressed by the instructor. In addition, an effort will be made to integrate current events into the content of the course by beginning each session with a discussion of any new or developing issues in international political economy. Students are encouraged to keep abreast of relevant developments by reading some major newspaper (*The New York Times*), weekly magazines (*The Economist*), or journals like *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* on a regular basis and/or watching or listening to network broadcasts on television or radio.

Your attendance in the course is required. Failure to attend will result in a lower grade. If you miss an assignment/exam, you must let me know beforehand in order to receive a make-up. No exceptions. Also, if a student requires additional help or has special learning needs, please let me know immediately at the beginning of the semester.

[Descriptive week by week course outline that avoids treating disciplines separately and sequentially and instead integrates knowledge and insights from disciplines:](#)

VI. Course Assignments, Requirements, and Outline

VII. Your grade will be based on the following assignments (as detailed below):

Exam #1	25%
Paper #1	25%
Final Exam	25%
Essay	15%
Attendance/ Participation.....	10% (Including Internet Research Assignments, in class projects)
<hr/>	
Total:	100%

VIII.

IX. Part One: Defining IPE and Globalization

Part One introduces students to the dynamic interaction of states, society, and the markets. Here we are introduced to the concepts employed in political science (the state, sovereignty, globalization), sociology (human behavior as influenced by societal structure, groups, race, gender and classes) and economics (the market and the prisoner's dilemma). The goal of Part One is to draw the connections between the various concepts in order to provide a comprehensive definition of IPE. This definition, I argue, must include elements of political science, economics, and sociology.

This definition will also highlight the dynamic of globalization. Globalization can be defined as the increasing integration of international markets being brought about by rapidly expanding worldwide flows of goods, services, capital, information, and people. Foundations of **economic, political, and social life** are changing due to globalization. We will examine the interaction of these three forces. In particular, **economic forces are changing society's connection to the state**. As a result, **politicians (i.e. the state)** on both the

political left and political right are responding to the demands of **individuals in society** as well as **societal groups** to control the **economic forces** of globalization.

This quote, taken from William Greider's *One World, Ready or Not* (p. 1), illustrates the interdisciplinary aspects of globalization and IPE:

“The logic of **commerce and capital** has overpowered the inertia of **politics** and launched an epoch of great **social** transformations. Settled facts of material life are being revised for **rich and poor nations** alike. **Social understandings** that were formed by the hard **political struggles** of the twentieth century are put in doubt. Old verities about the rank ordering of **nations** are revised and a new map of the world is gradually being drawn. These great changes sweep over the affairs of mere **governments** and destabilize the **established social and political orders** in both advanced and primitive **societies**. Everything seems new and strange. Nothing seems certain.”

Readings for Part One: (Five Weeks)

Introduction to Conceptual and Analytical Issues: IPE as an Interdisciplinary Course

Cohn, Chapter 1
Outsourcing Handouts – Assignment “What is IPE?”

Globalization: States, Markets, and Society

Cohn, pp. 411-420 (from Chapter 12)
Friedman, Opening Scene and Chapters 1-4
Video, Life and Debt
Handout – Measuring Globalization

Global Governance and the Prisoner's Dilemma

Cohn, Chapter 2
WTO Internet Assignment (www.wto.org)
“The Battle for Seattle” handout

Exam # 1

X. Part Two: States, Markets, and Society

Now that we have a working interdisciplinary definition of IPE based on our understanding of globalization, Part Two is set up to introduce students to the three dominant perspectives in IPE. Each perspective incorporates leading concepts, values, and assumptions from political science, sociology and economics. However, each perspective emphasizes one particular foci of the interdisciplinary triangle: either the **state**, **economics (markets)**, or **society**. Each perspective can tell us about the process of globalization,

but from a unique angle. Not only can we define IPE and globalization as interdisciplinary, but we will be able to analyze and evaluate IPE and globalization through the use of these three perspectives.

The first perspective is Mercantilism. Mercantilism emphasizes the role of the **state** in regulating the **economic and social forces** that influence state power.

The second perspective is Liberalism. Liberalism emphasizes the role of **economics/markets** and how they shape (and should shape) **society**. Liberalism also emphasizes the actions of **individual actors** (**workers, women, entrepreneurs, etc.**) within the market.

The third perspective is Marxism. Marxism emphasizes the role of **social class structure and class conflict** that results from **market (capitalism) forces** and the repression of the **working class (children, immigrants, women, among others)** by the **institutions of the state**.

Following our understanding of each, we draw on the history of IPE in order to evaluate the comparative theoretical value of each perspective. Paper Topic # 2 defined below seeks to incorporate an interdisciplinary understanding of events in the history of IPE.

XI.

XII. Readings for Part Two (around five weeks)

Perspectives on Political Economy:

Liberalism:

Cohn, Chapter 4 and pp. 199-203

Friedman, Chapters 6-8 and Chapter 12

Realism/ Mercantilism:

Cohn, Chapter 3

Handout, "Anti-Globalist Challengers" pp. 81-104

Friedman, Chapter 18

Marxism- Historical/Structuralist School

Cohn, Chapter 5

Handout, "Anti-Globalist Challengers" pp. 104-117

Friedman, Chapter 15

Assignment: Is President Bush a liberal, mercantilist, or Marxist? Case of the Steel Tariffs

International Economic History

Cohn, pp. 139-153 and pp. 203-213

Take Home Exam/Paper: "The Theoretical Perspective That in My View Best Explains Some Major Development or Developments in IPE." In this paper, you will be expected to choose some major event or events in the recent history of IPE and evaluate how well these events are explained by the **three** main theoretical perspectives studied in International Political Economy (Liberalism, Mercantilism, Marxism). The events chosen may be a single episode (e.g., China joining the WTO, NAFTA, outsourcing, Battle in Seattle, Doha Trade Talks) or may be a longer-term series of events (e.g., the evolution of the trading system, the rise and/or decline of specific countries or groups of countries). The focus of the paper should be on the comparative explanatory value of each of the three theoretical perspectives. What (if anything) does each of the three perspectives offer to help explain the event(s) you have chosen? Is any one other three perspectives clearly superior as a means of explanation?

In other words, you are to employ, evaluate, and compare the concepts and perspectives of each disciplinary focus: Mercantilism and its emphasis on **politics and the state**; Liberalism with its emphasis on **market economics**; and Marxism with its emphasis on **human behavior as determined by societal and class structure and conflict**. This assignment thus requires you to analyze your “event” from the three interdisciplinary foci: states, market-economics, and society. You must also then state your opinion as to which force – **the state, society (groups and/or individuals), or markets** – most influenced, shaped, altered, and impacted the event you analyze.

The paper, roughly 5-7 pages, will be worth 25% of your total grade. The paper is due around the 9th week of classes.

XIII. Part Three: Addressing the Problems of Globalization (5 weeks)

Essay: Using a definition of globalization that you develop, examine the impact of globalization on nation states, on the operation of the global economy and markets, and on society/human behavior (for example, on class structure, on gender, on the family, on native culture, on the worker, on the environment, etc.). Choose an article and topic that might be of interest to you – for example the environment, on culture, on trade, on money, etc. The paper should be 3-4 pages, double-spaced, and properly referenced where appropriate.

!! Extra Credit: Present your essay in class as PowerPoint presentation and receive extra credit on your essay.

Issue Areas in IPE

International Trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Read: Cohn, Chapters 8 and 9
Friedman, Chapters 9-11

International Monetary Politics and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Read: Cohn, Chapters 6 and 7

Less Developed Countries and the role toward Modernization

Read: Cohn Chapter 10 and 11
Friedman, Chapters 19-20

Oil and the Environment if we have time.

Final Exam: As Scheduled for Finals Week,