

Guidelines for MULTI, INTER & TRANSDISCIPLINARY Work at URI

The University of Rhode Island supports multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary teaching and research at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. These forms of teaching and research move beyond a discipline-specific boundary.

***"Multidisciplinarity"** contrasts disciplinary perspectives in an additive manner, meaning two or more disciplines each provide their viewpoint on a problem from their perspectives. Multidisciplinarity involves little interaction across disciplines.*

***Interdisciplinarity** combines two or more disciplines to a new level of integration suggesting component boundaries start to break down. Interdisciplinarity is no longer a simple addition of parts but the recognition that each discipline can affect the research output of the other.*

***Transdisciplinarity** occurs when two or more discipline perspectives transcend each other to form a new holistic approach. The outcome will be completely different from what one would expect from the addition of the parts. Transdisciplinarity results in a type xenogenesis where output is created as a result of disciplines integrating to become something completely new."*

There are many ways that colleges and department may promote this work, including:

Appointments: Departments and colleges are encouraged to request joint appointments when appropriate. Typically, faculty recruited for joint appointments are appointed in one department (or college) as a promotion and tenure home, but have defined duties, responsibilities and rights in one or more other units (colleges, departments, schools, programs, centers, institutes, etc.). Depending on need, joint appointments may be either limited or unlimited. The terms and conditions of joint appointments should be clearly defined and approved by the Provost's Office, particularly in the case of new hires. In some cases, joint appointments may require a budget commitment from both units, although some limited joint appointments may simply allow work done in one unit to count toward workload commitments in another. In addition to faculty positions, department and colleges are encouraged to consider the cross-unit use of graduate teaching assistants. Such appointments could help build the graduate program in one unit, while meeting the teaching or research needs in another.

Programs and Courses: Many majors, minors and graduate programs at the University already require course work in more than one unit. These may be multidisciplinary (e.g., a thematic major or minor that requires coursework from several departments) or interdisciplinary (e.g. a program with entirely new integrative courses with unique course codes) or a combination of the two (e.g., a program that requires a core of integrative courses as well as multidisciplinary coursework). Because many contemporary issues require multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary work, the University encourages the establishment of new multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary programs. At the course level, cross-listing is encouraged when a course spans more than one discipline.

Research: The University houses several multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary centers and institutes that focus on either specific (e.g., underwater vehicles) or broad (e.g., social sciences, humanities) research areas. Faculty and students should become familiar with these centers and institutes and, when appropriate, seek research collaborators through these entities. When new areas emerge, faculty should consider developing new centers and institutes through procedures found in the University Manual. Entities that cross department and college boundaries are particularly encouraged. Beyond established entities, the Research Office is available to work with multidisciplinary teams and identify sources of funding for this research.

Most faculty and administrators recognize the importance of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary work, but sometimes cite institutional barriers to its accomplishment. At times, the barriers may be more perceived than real, but the guidelines below address some of these issues.

Workload credit: Under both the University Manual and collective bargaining agreement between the Council for Postsecondary Education and URI Chapter of the American Association of University Professors, workload assignments are made by department chairs and approved by college deans. In non-departmentalized colleges, deans make workload assignments usually with the help of associate deans, area coordinators, etc. When making workload assignments, chairs should be aware that University policy is to count teaching effort in the department that staffs or funds the course. Hence, a chair need not be concerned that allowing a faculty member to teach in another department will lessen the recorded teaching effort of the home department. Faculty should be aware that teaching outside of their home departments is fully recognized by the administration as part of a normal teaching load. When courses are taught by more than two faculty, chairs and deans will have to work carefully with the instructors to develop a plan that fairly gives credit to the instructors involved in the course. If faculty are co-teaching a course from different departments and/or colleges, there should be conversation and coordination between the faculty, chairs, and/or deans to ensure consistency and fairness in the awarding of teaching credit to faculty. When courses are co-taught, typically credit is divided between faculty. For example, a course co-taught by two faculty will typically count as one-half course per faculty member.

Giving full credit to multiple instructors who are team teaching can be expensive and inefficient. Chairs and deans should ask the following questions before giving full course credit to each faculty member:

- Is the course large enough to justify such commitment of resources?
- Does the nature of the course require the full participation of each instructor for the duration of the course?
- Has a faculty member receiving full credit participated in the entire course?

Chairs and deans are urged to be strategic and selective in the allocation of team teaching efforts to certain courses with full credit to multiple instructors.

For funded research projects, relative credit is identified on the Internal Approval for Proposal Transmittal form. Overhead funds are shared according to the distribution indicated on the Facilities and Administrative Revenue form. For non-funded projects, faculty should provide a statement of relative commitment to a project.

Recognition: At the Provost-level, the administration recognizes the importance of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary work and considers it a positive attribute in a faculty member's application for promotion and tenure. Although each college and department will have its own disciplinary norms, which are sometimes influenced by program accreditation requirements, the administration encourages colleges and departments to view multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary work favorably in annual review and promotion and tenure recommendations. This may mean that faculty are encouraged to do (or at least not discouraged from doing) teaching, research and publishing outside of their home disciplines and are encouraged to engage with scholars from other fields. This information could be relayed in appointment letters. When possible, these forms of teaching and scholarship should also be supported through faculty development funds and other sources of funding.

Communication: Perhaps above all, it is important to communicate the value of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary work, publicize and celebrate successes in this type of work, and encourage further development of these initiatives.