

JCAP Subcommittee on Task Force Review
The Interdisciplinary Solutions Task Force Report
Final May 26, 2011

General comments

This Task Force investigated ways of facilitating research collaborations and course and program development between members of different departments. Synergies exist and are being developed between disciplines, such as physics and medicine, environment and psychology, or communication and oceanography. Such natural couplings of research areas should be identified and explored to determine their feasibility at URI. Research tends to drive teaching and is often many years ahead of teaching. Implementing ways to move ahead and incorporate the newest innovative areas of research into the classroom will reduce the lag time between research and teaching.

Teaching has multiple layers. Team teaching of interdisciplinary courses is one level. Another level is to build new programs and educate students to be better prepared to serve in emerging professions that are interdisciplinary in nature. Programs tend to become interdisciplinary when moving toward working on real world problems (e.g. addressing climate change or obesity), and when they embrace experiential learning.

Recommendations In Progress

The collection of interdisciplinary programs is being expanded. New ones include an Environmental Health Studies Program and Neuroscience.

The Honors Program has a long history and hundreds of students in interdisciplinary classes each year, organizes the interdisciplinary Honors Colloquium -the University's largest and most prominent public lecture series- and encourages high performing students to cultivate an interdisciplinary identity through the office of National Fellowships and Academic Opportunity.

A recommendation is being given to the Council for Research to develop a survey to build a knowledge base of ongoing interdisciplinary initiatives, and a portal to facilitate communication related to interdisciplinary work.

Recommendations in Need of Faculty Involvement

Create programs that give URI a leading edge in new emerging areas. Identify and build new programs that take into account their viability in society and the expertise of URI faculty such as environmental health, neuroscience, environmental science; Blue MBA, and IEP. These will change over time.

Consider as a model the interdisciplinary initiatives that are being examined by the Harrington School in collaboration with CELS and the Metcalf Institute at GSO:

B.A./B. S. in Environmental Studies, Master's in Marine and Environmental Communication, Design One's Own B. A.

Develop an interdisciplinary minor with suggested courses. Work is being done to create an Urban Studies Minor at CCE, as well as an update of the General Studies BA into an Interdisciplinary BA.

Recommendations in Need of Resources

It must be determined how to assign teaching credit for faculty involved in interdisciplinary courses. The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Research and Economic Development will work together with Deans to facilitate new initiatives and hold forums before Promotion and Tenure season to discuss the main issues of concern and how best to deal with them.

The barriers posed by joint appointments also require consideration.