

## Interdisciplinary Studies 200 – Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies

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DH 102 – Center for Interdisciplinary Studies

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(843) 383-8059 – voice mail goes to my email, i.e. I see it even over the weekend.

**Office Hours:** I will be available for you to do google hangout chat or video conversations at our mutual convenience – feel free to contact me and propose a time. I am always available via email, of course, and you are welcome to call my office phone (listed above).

If you have *technical* difficulties with any part of the course, I am probably not the right person to help solve your problem. You may want to check in with Dick Coldwell (or your advisor, which might be me) to be directed to any support that is not about course content or assignments. If several students contact me about an issue, and I am able to find out a solution, I will email the solution to everyone.

### Course Description:

What does it mean to combine two or more disciplines? How do research fields inform each other, and how do researchers and writers explore and acknowledge these connections? How can approaches, ideas, and questions from one discipline intersect with what I am studying in another discipline, and how do those intersections prompt new solutions to questions? How can I apply what I have learned in one class to what I want to learn in another? How is my learning relevant to what I want to pursue in my career, and how can I integrate creative approaches to problem solving across disciplines to facilitate academic and professional flexibility and success? These are questions we will explore and begin to answer in the *IS 200: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* course.

IS 200 explores these questions, building a foundation for further coursework in Interdisciplinary Studies and creating a better understanding of how the university works: disciplines, majors, career paths, interests come into focus in a new way, helping students take charge of the direction in which they want to take their studies. The course also counts toward the “Scholarship Pillar” in the General Education curriculum. *IS 200: Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* lays the foundation for integrative learning, thinking, and research by combining a theoretical approach with both the personal and the practical.

After completing this course, students will be able to

1. Define “interdisciplinary work” and explain its relevance to academics in general, in addition to the course of study they wish to pursue.
2. Explain the process and benefit of interdisciplinary work to a general audience.
3. Distinguish between and apply different research methodologies.
4. Utilize resources (print, other media, human) to access different forms of knowledge and expertise, and understand how these resources reflect field-specific approaches.
5. Understand and articulate how their chosen career path involves different disciplines and position themselves and their ambitions in this context.

**The course begins with a theoretical overview of the meaning of interdisciplinary study and its applications in an academic setting. It examines the usefulness and limitations of disciplinary work**

**and the ways interdisciplinary studies can expand on them. The chapter assignments are linked to reflections about a current issue (climate change, immigration, access to health care, education reform) and to interview projects to allow for connections to the world outside the classroom. The final component of the theoretical part of the class is a mock-up interdisciplinary research project.**

### **Interdisciplinary Studies in Academia and Beyond**

What do global warming, criminal recidivism, neighborhood economic development, and childhood obesity all have in common? They are complex problems – problems that require the input of experts from a variety of disciplines to fully understand and explore solutions. Where an individual discipline, such as psychology or sociology or math or biology or economics, might approach a problem from only *one* perspective, an interdisciplinary scholar will consider *multiple* perspectives, find common ground, and employ different ways of researching and thinking to work out a solution. The interdisciplinary scholar understands the contributions, but also the limitations, of individual disciplines, and combines relevant approaches to address a complex problem. Finally, the interdisciplinary scholar is constantly aware of his or her own learning and thinking process and can perform and articulate shifts in theories and approaches.

### **Goals and Expectations**

The course lays a foundation for further learning and studying, introducing the student to the practices of questioning and perspective-taking, understanding the boundaries, concerns and approaches of individual disciplines, identifying strategies of accessing and combining existing research from those fields, and finding solutions to complex problems. Through a series of short writing assignments, students will articulate their own positions on ideas and examine biases and perspectives. Examples will be drawn from social sciences, environmental sciences, and humanities and the arts to show the relevance of interdisciplinary approaches to a variety of projects involving multiple fields.

Students will combine different types of activities to make the theoretical material (the text book chapters) relevant to their own studies and lives, such as create written responses that apply the reading to real examples of interest to the student, set up an interdisciplinary research project, and explore a possible career (with an eye to interdisciplinary learning).

### **Textbook (required)**

Allen F. Repko: *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies*. 3rd Edition. SAGE 2020. You can rent this book, and I believe there is an online version available as well – either is fine, as long as you have consistent access to the correct edition (3<sup>rd</sup> – the cover is dark with a red orb).

### **Technology:**

You are expected to use Blackboard, which requires internet connection. You will need access to a computer/laptop with a decent keyboard to type up homework assignments in a word or google doc file, use spellcheck and grammar check, and upload assignments. For a couple of assignments you will need a visual recording device (a phone will do, or a laptop or table with a camera and microphone). It will be near impossible to complete all assignments well if you are relying *only* on a phone to write and post responses.

**Keep in mind that the *mobile* version of Bb (seen via phone) does not always show the full assignment – view assignments on a laptop or computer, so you have full instructions.**

## Evaluation: Grades and Expectations

**Grades: point system with a maximum of 1000 points for the course; all points are tracked on Blackboard in an ongoing tally.**

900-1000 = A

800-899 = B

700-799 = C

600-699 = D

Each assignment will earn points according to quality/response to prompt and expectations. Maximum number of points are as follows:

**Initial Introduction post** (video): 20 points

**Homework posts:** 9 chapter questions and reflections, 2 per week = 450 points total

**Interview projects** (video or written) (3 total (50 points each) ): 150 point total

**Research Process project, draft:** 75 points

**10 Quiz scores**, 3 pts each = 30 points total

**Research Process project, final version:** 175 points

**Final presentation** (video or written): 100 points

**Feedback will be provided for each assignment** you post on Blackboard; feedback may include the suggestion to work with a writing tutor to ensure ideas come across correctly. My main concern is content, but if I cannot clearly make out the meaning of your response, we are in trouble. In the beginning of the term, I will provide more detailed feedback to help you understand expectations; toward the end, I may simply post the point value. If you see no response to a post after several days, make sure you uploaded correctly. I will usually post responses on Tuesday evening and on Saturday. I will allow several attempts on posts *before* the deadline, and I will count the highest grade. *After* the deadline, your post can only earn partial credit (50%).

**Posts should be made on time** so the class can progress together and we can keep track of all assignments. All deadlines are set for 11 pm; this allows students who have other obligations to complete assignments in the evening. I will allow for a 1 hour grace period (until midnight) before posts are docked points; however, if you notice that you post late consistently, you may want to think about time management. If there are special circumstances that affect your work that you cannot change, please let me know. It is frustrating to be hurried in course work, and you may not be able to deliver your best work. The class is paced briskly – the first couple of weeks provide the foundation for our work together; if you fall behind, you may not be able to understand or complete the work, and therefore may not pass. Last year, 20 out of 22 students initially enrolled completed and passed the course – I enjoyed working with them, and I anticipate enjoying working with you!

**Everyone is included.** If you have paper work for a learning disability on file with the college, or need to establish such paper work, based on previous experience, please contact Robin Richardson ([rrichardson@coker.edu](mailto:rrichardson@coker.edu)) to make sure your professors are aware of your situation. Please note that, due to FERPA (privacy) law, I cannot inquire about any issues with you directly or contact Ms. Richardson myself – any communication has to be initiated by you.

## **Assignments:**

### **Initial Introduction post (video, about 2 minutes): 20 points maximum**

- Name, major/field of study, year, work experience and/or career ambition, family and personal interests.
- Choice of theme (for Real World Connection) and reason for it.
- What you think might be challenging, interesting, helpful, or confusing about this class.

(See Bb assignment for more detailed questions/work sheet suggestions)

### **Homework posts: 9 chapter questions and reflections, 2 per week = 450 points total**

For every chapter in the text book, you will post answers to two or three questions on Blackboard – these assignments serve to check reading and material comprehension. Do not *accidentally plagiarize* by relying too closely on the text in the book; you need to use your own words and your own examples in the responses to show that you actually *comprehend* the material, not just copy-and-paste. Do not rely on wikipedia etc. for definitions – they will not match. You need to read carefully. The homework questions will vary from comprehension to further application (i.e. exploring how specific material applies to your own field and research). These assignments need to be completed and posted by 11 pm twice a week; I will allow for a grace period of 60 minutes before the late penalty (50% of points) is applied. Missed assignments can be submitted late for up to 50% credit. If I notice writing issues in the posts (grammar, clarity, development), I will recommend working with a tutor on specific challenges to address them, and then expect improvement. My main focus is on content, but if I cannot clearly make out your thoughts, based on writing issues, I cannot give full points. You will see feedback and suggestions from me about that.

### **Interview projects (video or written) (3 total): 150 points total (50 points each)**

At three points during the term, you will be asked to conduct a short interview with a colleague, professor, friend, or family member (depending on who might have interesting answers to a specific set of questions) to explore the application of some of our class material in the world beyond our immediate class. Specific sets of questions will be posted on Bb.

### **Research Process project, draft: 75 points**

The last three chapters of our text book guide you through the process of conducting interdisciplinary research. It is a six-step process, and you will summarize this process in a paper that *describes* and *reflects on* the process of your particular project – you will not write an actual *research paper* (which would be about the *result* of your research) but a *process paper* (which will be about the ways interdisciplinary research differs from disciplinary research). Specific description will be posted on Bb. For a maximum of 75 points, you will post a draft of the paper, so I can give feedback for a revision.

### **Research Process project, final version: 175 points**

After making revisions, and probably expanding and editing the draft you posted before, you will post the final version for a grade.

### **Final presentation (video or written): 100 points**

In a final reflection, which takes the place of a final exam, you will discuss the insights gained from this course. I will provide a word bank to prompt specific topics to discuss, and I will provide a set of questions to address. You may choose to complete this assignment either in written form or orally (as a video), whichever you feel allows you to convey the most content most convincingly.

**All assignments are laid out in the calendar** – you will see that if you stay on top of the work, it will not be too much of a challenge to complete all aspects of the class.

### **Real World Connection**

**To provide a bridge between academia (classroom, textbook, college) and the “real world” (policies, observations, and experiences), we will use four examples of “complex problems” (problems that cannot effectively be considered, addressed, or solved from any one single discipline or perspective) to guide us through the course.** Assignment questions will occasionally ask you to develop a specific response *in relation to* one of these issues, serving as an example for a specific idea or process the textbook presents. You will choose *one* of these *at the beginning* of the course to serve as your “track,” or theme, and return to it for those assignments. Choose whichever appeals to you, either because you already feel it is relevant to you personally, or you think you know something about it, or you are curious, or because it can relate to your chosen field/career/interest in some way.

Each of these issues is political and potentially divisive – the purpose is not to come up with a yes/no response (is it right? Is it wrong? Will Dr. Klimek agree with me?), but to **consider and eventually understand** the complex ways different disciplines interact when we look at these issues carefully. The (often abstract, theoretical) material of the textbook becomes more real and comprehensible if we can link it to specific issues and questions we deal with today. I will grade the *quality* of those connections (the application of the textbook material) when I consider your responses, not your personal stance on an issue. You need to be able to have an open mind and be willing to learn from many perspectives and disciplines to succeed as an interdisciplinarian (someone who works across disciplinary boundaries) – this part of the course allows you to practice these traits.

**Climate Change:** Scientists agree that the earth’s climate is changing, and that this change is related to human activity. But the change of our climate is a complex problem – it involves sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.), business and trade, sociology (group behavior) and psychology (individual behavior), communication, and politics (and possibly more fields). Any approach to the problem of climate change requires consideration of factors and data from many different fields and perspectives, and will probably affect policies in complex ways.

**Immigration:** Currently one of the most divisive topics of conversation in politics, immigration has been part of the history of the US since its inception. Why is this country so conflicted about this subject, and how can solutions be found? Understanding this topic requires studies in politics, law, geography, history (our own and others), cultures and languages (our own and others), and business – it affects our group identity as a nation and our individual identity as a member of diverse communities.

**Health Care Access:** Despite many efforts to ensure every person’s access to appropriate and quality health care, the US continues to struggle to provide care to all. Why is it so difficult to take care of Americans’ health? The study of this issue requires consideration of a wide range of fields, such as the sciences, law, history, business, sociology and psychology, politics, and communication.

**Education Reform:** Education in the US has undergone many transformations since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, adjusting to the needs of an ever-changing society and work world. In the last 40 years, many attempts have been made to level the playing field for all students by developing standards and expectations. But what have been their effects, and where do we go next? Studying this complex subject involves sociology, psychology, history, education, and culture.

(See Bb assignment for specific assignment – I will list page numbers and questions, and I will occasionally add my own questions to those stated in the textbook. When you are asked to make use of the Real World Connection, the question will refer to it.)