INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION & RESEARCH AT UAF: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Report of Faculty Senate Task Force
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TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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“Transdisciplinary”, “multi-disciplinary”, and “pan-disciplinary”

• “A mode of research [or learning] undertaken by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice.”

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Reasons for interdisciplinary at UAF

• Being relevant to societal problems; making a link with the public and policy makers (e.g., AK Legislature)
• Educating the “New Public Intellectual”
• Funding requirements for interdisciplinary approaches
• Poised to become a world leader in interdisciplinary research & education
• Growing student demand
Charge of Task Force

• How do we create an institutional environment and “culture” that will help rather than hinder the progress of interdisciplinary research and education?
  – Identify problems, barriers, and constraints
  – Highlight efforts at UAF
  – Presents models of successful interdisciplinary research and education at other institutions
  – Make recommendations for change at UAF
Lots to build on!

- Long history of interdisciplinary research and education at UAF
- Several outstanding interdisciplinary education & research programs
- Top-level administration is supportive
- Growing student interest
INDS Education / degree programs

**Graduate degrees awarded by academic year**

INDS PhDs were 22% of all awarded in 2012

**INDS PhDs and MA/Ss awarded**

UAF examples

• Honors Program / special courses
• Indigenous Studies
• The Resilience and Adaptation Program
• SNRAS+SOM PhD in NR and Sustainability
• WERC, SNAP, BNZ LTER, IARC, CGC, EPSCoR, and...
Examples

• University of Hawai`i Manoa’s Interdisciplinary Cluster Hires Model at the
• Academy for Advanced *Interdisciplinary* Studies at Peking University
• “The New American University”: Research University as Knowledge Enterprise at Arizona State University
• The Stockholm Resilience Centre
Barriers and constraints

Institutional & Administrative Level

• Limited institutional frameworks;
• Students with co-advisors from different units are only counted for “primary” unit.
• Serving on INDS committees is discouraged by some department heads or deans
• Academic unit revenue distribution based on outdated statewide accounting system;
• Overhead from grants by faculty with joint appointments is sometimes disputed
Barriers and constraints

*Faculty Level*

• Disincentives for faculty engaging in interdisciplinary scholarship

• Promotion files evaluated primarily by “rank and file” disciplinarians from home unit;

• Cross-listed classes count for the departments of students, irrespective of instructor’s department
Barriers and constraints

*Student Level*

- Limited funding for INDS graduate students;
- The privileging of disciplinary students over INDS graduate students by some for departmental funding support;
- Requirement that INDS degree applicants have fully formed research proposals before being accepted
A start at recommendations...

• Shape “culture” to reward efforts
  – (Chancellor, Provost, administration)
• Review tenure and promotion process
  – (Provost, Deans, Faculty Senate)
• Provide more INDS student funding
  – (Deans, Dept Heads)
• Promote “cluster hires” and shared faculty workloads,
  – (Deans and Directors)
• Include faculty from both appointment areas (not just the academic home) on T&P committees
  – (Deans and faculty).
• Full thesis proposal requirement for acceptance to INDS degree program after student is accepted
  – (Dean of Grad Studies; curriculum committees).
• Establish a “Faculty of INDS Graduate Studies”
  – (Provost and Dean of Grad Studies)
Where to?

• How do we move from barriers to action?
  – Massive reorganization of units?

• Who is responsible for making each recommendation happen?
  – A Chancellor’s Task Force? A Town Hall?

• What is the timeline for specific tasks?
  – Some immediate; some long term