



THE NEWSLETTER

# INTEGRATIVE PATHWAYS

OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

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James Welch IV, Editor

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## AIS Conference Draws 7 Countries, Focuses on Health and Wellness

By

Kelly N. Kilgour, AIS 2016 Conference Coordinator  
and Angus McMurtry, AIS 2016 Co-Chair

AIS 2016 was attended by 200 people from seven different countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and United States. In true Canadian fashion, conference attendees were welcomed with warm greetings and sincere apologies for the unexpected cold temperatures and snowflakes (oddly, Ottawa had above normal temperatures before and after the conference). Nevertheless, many attendees appreciated the colder temperatures as a break from southern heat.

The 38<sup>th</sup> Annual AIS conference was hosted by the University of Ottawa in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada from October 27-29, 2016. The entire conference took place on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and the panoramic 12<sup>th</sup> floor of the Desmarais building, located on the University of Ottawa's main campus in downtown Ottawa.

*Interdisciplinary Approaches to Health, Wellness and Sustainability* was this year's conference theme. The theme was enacted in many subtle ways, such as conference bags for participants,

aluminium water bottles in each, local apples for some refreshment breaks, and AIS signage, banners and a table cover that will be reused in future conferences. More obvious manifestations of the theme included the presentation topics and a guided meditation session on Saturday morning.

AIS 2016 commenced in a large room with spectacular vast views of downtown Ottawa and Gatineau Park; local tourist attractions like Parliament Hill, Chateau Laurier, and National Art Gallery were visible. A Welcome Plenary and State of the Field session initiated the conference, where Co-Chairs Angus McMurtry and Karen Phillips introduced the conference and highlighted the Prime Minister's welcome letter. Machiel Keestra provided an energetic and bilingual (in English and French)

Presidential welcome. He articulated the importance of interdisciplinary discourses and collaborations across intercontinental borders and languages, along with the association's current growth towards intercontinental collaborations. Six speakers—from Canada, Germany, and United States—offered short summaries of interdisciplinary initiatives in their areas, including education, publication, conferences and future aims.

Three Keynote Speakers—Jenny Sasser, Chantelle A.M. Richmond, and

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## Convention Report

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David Pantalony—individually presented on separate days of the conference. Jenny presented a heartfelt chronological summary of her transdisciplinary, aging and Gero-Punk activities. Chantelle insightfully and persuasively outlined the interdisciplinary cultural and geographical considerations surrounding indigenous health. David gave a stimulating presentation of Canada’s scientific and medical historical innovations, and the complex variety of ways one can “read” museum artifacts. He sparked lively conversations by encouraging attendees to analyse and discuss the scientific and medical artifacts placed on each table and posed in his presentation slides.

Paper, panel, workshop and poster presentations at the conference (including 85 oral presentations over 10 concurrent sessions) covered a wide range of interdisciplinary themes. They embraced, among other

*At right: David Pantalony, one of three keynote speakers at the 2016 annual convention of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, discusses how to “read” museum artifacts, such as those pictured below.*



topics, pedagogical strategies and curriculum, interdisciplinary theory and rhetoric, career development, healthcare technologies, patient “voice” and involvement in healthcare, interprofessional teamwork education, and creativity through activities such as reflective writing, comic development, singing and theatre performances. The focal themes this year were health (in a very broad sense), aging, indigenous research, interprofessional education, innovative interdisciplinary pedagogies, and philosophy—and many innovative presentations were given in these areas in particular. One attendee was overheard cheerfully stating, “this conference is truly interdisciplinary with its range of people and topics!”

Further highlights of the conference included:

- An appreciation tribute during Friday’s cocktail reception to honor Bill Newell for his spirit, mentorship and academic collaborations. Many thankful

speeches, toasts and roasts were spoken along with a heartfelt (yet tongue-in-cheek) musical performance by AIS members.

- The Presidential spoon was handed from Machiel Keestra to James Welch IV.

- Interdisciplinary conversations continued at six Dinner circle restaurants along the lively Elgin Street, a block from the conference hotels, on Friday evening. One group, a diverse mix of Europeans, Americans and Canadians, enjoyed savoury vegan meals and drinks over energetic conversations at Pure Kitchen.

- Fresh collaboration ideas and partnerships budded throughout the conference. For instance, two presentations focusing on gaming through health education, one from Denmark and one from the United States, shared one concurrent session; these groups are discussing future partnerships together.

- Breakfast roundtable discussions of Sections and Guide topics



*Outgoing AIS Executive Director Bill Newell is honored at a roast and musical performance during the AIS convention in October*

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## Convention Report

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At left: Incoming AIS president James Welch (left) is passed the “Presidential Spoon” by outgoing president Machiel Kestra during the 38th annual convention of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, which was held at the University of Ottawa in October.

Below: Members of AIS perform a musical tribute/roast for Bill Newell, who retired as AIS Executive Director after 24 years.

took place on Friday and Saturday mornings, and two open spaced rooms were always open for greater networking, individual computer or group work, as well as unwinding with views of the Ottawa downtown and Gatineau Hills for an extended refreshment break.

- Poster presentations opened the cocktail reception and engaged conference attendees immediately in interdisciplinary discussions. Attendees mingled with poster presenters over appetizers and drinks.

- The conference wound down with an entertaining and humorous theatre play, entitled *Approaches to Knowledge*, performed by our dedicated AIS board members.

In sum, we—the AIS 2016 Organizing Committee—are delighted that AIS 2016, the first AIS conference outside the United States, was a triumphant interdisciplinary and intercontinental gathering.

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## Letter from Bill Newell

Dear AIS members,

*I was deeply touched by the personal tributes expressed during my retirement ceremony at this year's AIS conference, and also in the most recent issue of Integrative Pathways. It speaks to the collaborative nature of our field (and to the kind of people it attracts) when professional colleagues become personal friends. I will treasure those friendships for years to come.*

*In a larger sense, though, I am even more gratified by the vitality and growth of the organization I now leave in your hands. I am proud not only of its crucial mission but also of what it continues to feel like to be part of AIS.*

*We know IDS can take many useful forms, but I have always focused on the ways it empowers us to address complex issues. For me, it's the only game in town for coping with the defining intellectual challenges of the 21st century. I encourage you to continue to keep your eyes on that prize. I don't think I exaggerate when I say the future of the human race may depend on it.*

*But AIS is as special for how it goes about fulfilling its mission, as it is for the mission itself. I am delighted to see that, unlike most professional associations, AIS remains a place where rank and status are unimportant, where intellectual one-upmanship and put downs are replaced with nurturing and collaboration, and where senior leaders welcome conversations with newcomers and novices. I thank you most of all for maintaining that humane culture.*

Bill

### CALL FOR PAPERS

#### *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*

Special Volume: Newell Festschrift

Guest Editor: P. Sven Arvidson

Issues Co-Editors:

Gretchen Schulz and Simeon Dreyfuss

Submission Deadline: Nov. 30, 2017

To celebrate the legacy of its founder and retiring executive director, the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies will dedicate a special volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* to honor Dr. William H. Newell.

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to plan for an appropriate way to commemorate his contributions to the field. The Special Volume will be a collection of new, high-quality essays that critically reflect on and advance Dr. Newell's scholarship or advance the field of interdisciplinary studies to which his work is dedicated.

Email submissions of complete papers with abstracts are welcome. Suitable submissions will undergo peer-review.

Prospective authors should email their papers as attachments in Microsoft Word to P. Sven Arvidson (arvidson@seattleu.edu), who will be working with the *Issues* co-editors.

The manuscripts (between 7,000-12,000 words) should be double-spaced, conform to current APA style, and include an abstract (100-150 words). Photographs, illustrations, and other graphics should be attached separately in a JPEG or TIFF format.

To ensure anonymity during the refereeing process, manuscripts should bear only the title as a means of identification.

Contributors should send a cover letter giving title, author, affiliation, a brief biographical note to be included in the article, their full mailing address, phone number, and email address.

## Convention Report

### *Continued from page 3*

From the volunteer meetings to assemble conference bags, to the last conference session, conversations and laughter were constantly heard!

Many attendees told the conference committee and volunteers about how welcome they felt, and our graduate student volunteers were amazed at the friendliness of the AIS members. We in the Organizing Committee of AIS 2016 officially passed on the active conference planning reins (and the A, I, S metallic letters

we sourced) to next year's hosts, University of Maryland, Baltimore County. We look forward to seeing our new and lasting AIS members again at Maryland, Baltimore in 2017.

Finally, we would like to thank all of those who attended. Without the contribution, spirit and support of the entire AIS community, no amount of conference planning could have mattered. We are thankful for the support and guidance of the AIS board, especially Bill Newell, Machiel Keestra, James Welch, Roz Schindler, Jennifer Dellner and Scott Crabill.

# Plasticity in the Brain and Elsewhere: Looking Back at Two Years of AIS Presidency

By Machiel Keestra  
Past-President, AIS

When Lashley wrote in 1930 about “a degree of plasticity, of organization, and of adaptation in behaviour which is far beyond any present possibility of explanation” he was not writing about our Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, but of course about the brain (Lashley, 1930 #8058 24). Perhaps the most impressive insight of 20th century brain science is indeed how a seemingly amorphous mass of vulnerable neurons and their numerous but fragile connections enables the wonders of the mind. These mental functions in turn enable individuals to communicate and collaborate with each other in smaller and larger associations.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, this striking “plasticity, organization and adaptation in behaviour” is observable at several levels of organization in the living world, even at the level at which our Association for Interdisciplinary Studies is functioning.

Upon the occasion of having had the bittersweet pleasure, yet with a lot of confidence of handing over AIS's presidential spoon to James Welch IV, let me briefly recount three important developments of AIS in the last few years that demonstrate its degrees of plasticity, organization and adaptation—revealing it as a rather brainy association, indeed. I'm focusing on developments that touch upon different levels of organization: internationalization, fostering diversity, and enhanced options for individuals and groups of members.

One of the brain's impressive capabilities is of flexibly adapting to new environments, even into such an extent that other cultural and linguistic

environments get deeply entrenched and influence almost all brain and cognitive processes. AIS has proven in recent years to be similarly adaptive, as it has increased its international character considerably. Although there always have been some international conference participants and authors and a scattered non-US board member, in recent years this presence has become much larger and visible. Moreover, this presence has essentially enriched our conversations due

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*Obviously, increasing diversity requires a sustained effort and attention coupled with a healthy dose of suspicion against one's own “normal” functioning.*

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to local differences in views on and practices regarding interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Our last conference in Ottawa, Canada did prove that point even more visibly, with several Canadian contributions about interprofessional collaboration, a brief presentation of Latin-American contributions to our journal, *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, and a panel session on European perspectives.

To round it off, conference participants were encouraged to renew their passports as AIS is involved in the preparations of the September 2017 Transdisciplinary-Net conference in Lüneburg, Germany and the University of Amsterdam's Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies will host the 2019 annual AIS conference in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Opening that conference as I did with some sentences in French made perhaps feel some participants somewhat disoriented and even confused, yet those are experiences intrinsically part of interdisci-

plinary studies.

Even though the brain's plasticity and adaptiveness allows it to flexibly adjust cognition and behavior, we also know that automatisms and habits play a very large role partly because of efficiency reasons. To avoid those, it is sometimes useful to explicitly take a second look and articulate new ways of going about. Over the last few years, we have during conferences and board meetings acknowledged and discussed the lack of diversity along several dimensions in our organization. These discussions ranged from articulating more explicitly in our mission that interdisciplinarity is also about integrating insights from diverse communities, to questioning how we could

make our conferences more accessible and attractive to academics from communities that are underrepresented in our midst and to reformulating nomination and selection procedures for board membership.

Obviously, increasing diversity requires a sustained effort and attention coupled with a healthy dose of suspicion against one's own “normal” functioning. We therefore hope also to count on you, as individual members, to support us in improving in this dimension—for example by drawing our attention to overlooked flaws in our organization or with ideas for helpful developments.

This brings me to the fundamental level of organization: for the brain these are the individual neurons, for AIS these are our members. The last few years we have introduced additional options for individuals to become active and contributing to AIS.

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# Message from AIS President James Welch IV

*As incoming president of this esteemed association, I'd like to use this space to inform our readers of changes to the board of directors, and write a bit about my background with AIS and my thoughts about future directions.*

*First of all, I would like to express deep appreciation to our previous president, Machiel Keestra, for his diligent efforts and leadership over the last two years. Machiel has done much to expand the scope of AIS, helping to make it a truly international organization, and strengthening its ties with other groups focused on interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary activities. Machiel's organizational strategies have made our board meetings quite productive and well organized. As is the tradition with AIS past presidents, he will continue to be a strong and active voice in the organization, lending his charming accent and whimsical sense of metaphor to our deliberations for years to come.*

*Other changes to the board membership include the departure of Tami Carmichael, who will continue to be involved in the work of AIS. She is now overseeing a vibrant new majors pathway at the University of North Dakota in Integrated and Interdisciplinary Studies and hopes to involve more of those undergraduates in the work of AIS. In addition, she continues her*



*Dr. James Welch IV, new president of the Association of Interdisciplinary Studies, addresses the AIS conference in Ottawa.*

*work with partner institutions in Norway and with AAC&U as a Fellow in their Scientific Thinking and Integrative Reasoning (STIR) initiative. Marcus Tanner has shifted positions from at-large member to a new ex-officio position of Honor Society chair, in which he will continue his efforts to strengthen the activities of Alpha Iota Sigma. I am pleased to introduce our two new at-large members, Robin DeRosa and Paul Hirsch.*

*Robin is the Director of a large Interdisciplinary Studies program at Plymouth State University in New Hampshire. She teaches courses on interdisciplinary theory and research. Robin holds a Ph.D. from Tufts in Eng-*

*lish, with a focus on early American literature and history. Her work centers on ways to build innovative and learner-driven futures for higher education, especially public higher education. She is involved in the Open Education movement, which focuses on sharing educational materials through open licensing and leveraging networked learning to connect students to real-world communities of practice.*

*At recent AIS conferences, Robin has presented on how academic technology can strengthen the principles and processes of interdisciplinary education, and would like to concentrate on this work as a board member.*

*On the subject of becoming an AIS board member, Robin has this to say:*

*"I appreciate the supportive ethos of AIS, since many of us work in the margins of our own institutions, and I look forward to assisting AIS in its efforts to use technology to build a more cohesive and open community of interdisciplinary practitioners. In*



*Dr. Robin DeRosa*

*Continued on page 7*

## Keestra Remarks

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Mentioned here before have been the AIS sections, self-initiated around a particular domain or topic and self-organized by AIS members and open to non-members, we hope that these "small community networks" will flourish and expand their connections.

During last conference, several such AIS sections were present and we hope that next conference will see several panel sessions stemming from

those. Indeed, we may expect that AIS's overall behavior will flexibly respond to such initiatives, just like the brain's overall dynamics are sensitive to influences exerted by smaller functional networks.

Although cognitive neuroscientists no longer believe in a "control center" in the brain, as our cognition and behavior seems to be driven by rather loose functional assemblies of neural networks dynamically coupled with our bodies and the world, an organization like AIS still has differentially

influential levels of organization. We became again aware of this upon the retirement of our energetic and resourceful founding executive director, Bill Newell, requiring a reorganization and redistribution of several organizational tasks.

Changing the hands that hold the president's spoon will also imply both continuity and change and I'm glad to play a new role, encouraging all of you to also consider becoming an influential node in the inspiring and collegial network that AIS is.

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Welch Message

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particular, I would like to think about building a more robust AIS community through Twitter and other social media channels to facilitate the sharing of resources and collaboration on curricular and scholarly projects. I am very grateful for the opportunity to serve on the board, and look forward to getting to know more of my AIS colleagues in the coming months."

Paul Hirsch is on the faculty of the Environmental Studies department at



Dr. Paul Hirsch

SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry, teaching environmental leadership, policy analysis, and ethics. He has worked to create institutional spaces where the skill-set required for engag-

ing across disciplines can be valued and supported.

On attending his first AIS conference: "I was refreshed and invigorated by not being put on the spot to justify my intellectual existence through a disciplinary frame. I was also impressed and inspired both by the depth of the dialog among AIS members at a conceptual/philosophical level, as well as the clear commitment on the part of those I spoke with to engagement in practical and social issues. I think the organization has just begun to scratch the surface in terms of the need and desire of those across diverse disciplines and institutions for rigorous and inclusive interdisciplinary publications and venues." Paul's work has been proudly published in *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. During his tenure as a board member, Paul hopes to expand our influence and credibility among researchers and scholars in diverse fields, especially programming around inter-

*[T]he time has come for this organization to revisit and revise its constitution and by-laws, not in an attempt to shift the purpose of AIS, but to reform its organizational structure so that it effectively addresses the contemporary contexts of interdisciplinarity.*

disciplinary environmental thinking and problem solving.

We welcome these wonderful new voices to our board of directors and look forward to a productive midyear meeting in a few months.

My own path to the AIS board has been a rather meandering one. I first discovered interdisciplinary studies in the '80s. At that time, the major was only offered at a handful of institutions, often of the "alternative" variety, and I found that it suited both my expansive and subversive interests at the time. The fact that there was an alternative to specialization was welcome, yet quite risky. After a couple of decades of further meandering, I returned to graduate school, and found that interdisciplinary studies had become less marginalized and more coherent, due to increasing scholarship on the subject and also, its application to specific professional fields. My graduate research naturally led me into the warm embrace of AIS, and I have never looked back.

My relationship with AIS deepened during my first faculty position, under the tutelage of Allen Repko; I helped him establish an interdisciplinary studies curriculum founded upon AIS scholarship and the principles of integration and complex problem solving. Bill Newell's work had a heavy hand in that curriculum and the Repko textbook that emerged therefrom.

As I begin my term as president in the immediate wake of Bill stepping down as Executive Director, the dynamics of intergenerational sustainability and organizational transition are, naturally, foremost on my mind. As indicated in the last newsletter, and in the testimonials at the Ottawa conference,

Bill's influence on AIS can hardly be overstated. However, Bill's retirement does not represent an existential crisis for AIS, or even a radical departure from its mission and vision. Bill Newell cannot be replaced, and at this point there are no plans to appoint a new Executive Director. Instead, the board of directors and the leadership team will be dividing up the duties he had taken on so indefatigably over the years. Moreover, the time has come for this organization to revisit and revise its constitution and by-laws, not in an attempt to shift the purpose of AIS, but to reform its organizational structure so that it effectively addresses the contemporary contexts of interdisciplinarity. This process will be conducted according to the present by-laws, and will involve, in stages, the board of directors, past presidents and the AIS membership at large.

As president, my aim during this process is to maintain the founding principles of the organization while acknowledging the way the interdisciplinary landscape has expanded and shifted over the years. These two aims are far from irreconcilable. Newell's ultimate vision for AIS was to establish interdisciplinary studies as a coherent and respected academic field. His work, along with that of Julie Klein and numerous other interdisciplinary scholars, helped move interdisciplinary studies from the margins to an established program at most every college and university. Interdisciplinarity has become a by-word in research and professional development, a catch phrase used in education and well beyond.

As an organization, I believe we must continue to advocate for best

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## Book Based on ‘Misguided Assumptions’

Frickel, Scott, Mathieu Albert, & Barbara Prainsack, eds., *Investigating Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Theory and Practice across Disciplines*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016, 249 pp.

Reviewed by Rick Szostak, University of Alberta

Incredibly, on page 7 the editors identify three assumptions that they mistakenly see as underlying social scientific analysis of interdisciplinarity; they suggest that debunking these

### Welch Message

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*practices in interdisciplinary research, teaching and scholarship, and to help faculty and administrators develop robust interdisciplinary studies programs.*

*At the same time, we must come to grips with the fact that the pluralistic nature of interdisciplinarity enables it to be utilized in a multiplicity of contexts and applications, inside and outside of academia. I do not believe that it is productive, or even possible, for AIS to control the proliferation of these contexts. However, I do believe that we can continue to support and cultivate relationships with the practice of interdisciplinarity in all its forms and, in doing so, continue to refine our understanding of interdisciplinary theory and method.*

*As always, the rest of the board and I encourage your ideas and input as we embark on this transition.*

*Season's Greetings!*

*James Welch IV*

*President, Association for Interdisciplinary Studies*

*Note: You can read more about Robin DeRosa's work at [www.robinderosa.net](http://www.robinderosa.net).*

three assumptions will be the main task of the book. Those assumptions are: 1) that interdisciplinarity is better than disciplinarity; 2) that disciplines are silos that constrain the free development of interdisciplinary knowledge; and 3) that interdisciplinary interactions are “unconstrained by the status hierarchies and power asymmetries that operate within disciplines.”

There may well be some people out there that make these three assumptions. But I can't think of any. Certainly, scholars long associated with AIS—or td-net or I2S—would never assume #1 or #3, and would take a nuanced approach to #2. Though scholars of interdisciplinarity may speak of a “more comprehensive understanding” that results from interdisciplinary analysis, they note that this builds on insights from disciplinary research and thus that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. It

is simply inane, then, to assume that one is “better.” Scholars of interdisciplinarity spend much of their time delineating strategies for overcoming barriers to interdisciplinarity, including the hierarchies, prejudices, and power asymmetries the editors imagine to have been ignored in the past (I am reminded of Tanya Augsburg and Stuart Henry speaking of “disciplinary hegemony”). And I could point to many works that have recognized that disciplines evolve and thus do borrow

from other disciplines from time to time. (The editors themselves eventually recognize that there are indeed institutional and intellectual barriers to interdisciplinarity rooted in disciplines, but suggest that these may be empirically less important than barriers to disciplinarity rooted in interdisciplinary practice)

By grounding its analysis in misguided assumptions the book is much less useful than it might have been. Disheartened though I was at page 7, I held on to the hope that the promised empirical analysis by the book's contributors might

yet yield valuable insights. I was occasionally rewarded.

With respect to assumption #2, the editors' main point is that disciplines do indeed evolve. They also point to bibliometric evidence that disciplinary scholars do often cite other disciplines (which I think we all knew, though

we might not always have said so), and that disciplinary scholars do address those complex problems that are assumed to require interdisciplinarity. The latter observation is of course meaningless: Interdisciplinarity, I would argue, is called for because each discipline brings a partial perspective, not because they simply ignore complex issues. Notably, though, chapter 1 surveys 18 recipients of



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## Book Review

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fellowships that allow tenured professors to pursue a year of training in another discipline, yet does find that these scholars face serious resistance within their disciplines to their interdisciplinary research agendas. This and other chapters provide direct evidence against the editorial insistence that disciplines are broadly supportive of interdisciplinarity.

The book is most interesting when it discusses interdisciplinary research endeavors. One frequent observation is that these are often driven by the availability of grants for interdisciplinary research. This observation is hardly new but it is useful to see it identified across a variety of times and places (see especially chapters 2, 8 and 10). It is hardly surprising—but worth chronicling—that within such endeavors disciplinary snobbishness is often a serious barrier both to research and to career progress of scholars from non-favored disciplines. The editors are surely correct to worry that “top-down” interdisciplinarity guided by grant-driven administrators can be problematic and indeed not very interdisciplinary.

Several chapters also document the oft-observed but important fact that interdisciplinary research takes time, for each researcher needs to learn about other disciplines and get to know collaborators. Chapter 3 studied four research teams across academia and industry and makes the more novel observation that humor is often used successfully to transcend disciplinary snobbishness.

I was particularly interested in the observation (in chapters 2 and 3) that different meanings of interdisciplinarity are employed strategically within interdisciplinary research groups to

justify strategies that favor particular disciplines. I would take this as yet further justification of the importance of a shared understanding of the nature of interdisciplinarity.

Chapter 4 discusses how social scientists and humanists in medical schools suffer by being evaluated by medical faculty who privilege experimentation as the best/only method. The authors compare their results to findings that different methods are valued on social science adjudication committees when different disciplines are equally represented. This analysis

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*It is hardly surprising—but worth chronicling—that within [interdisciplinary research] endeavors disciplinary snobbishness is often a serious barrier both to research and to career progress of scholars from non-favored disciplines. The editors are surely correct to worry that “top-down” interdisciplinarity guided by grant-driven administrators can be problematic and indeed not very interdisciplinary.*

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to my mind reinforces the importance of a shared understanding that interdisciplinarity means respect for different methods, and also points to the need to identify quite precise administrative structures that will support interdisciplinarity.

Chapters 5 through 7 supposedly seek to compare “disciplines” and “interdisciplinarity.” But each in fact compares “disciplines” and “interdisciplines.” It is a serious mistake to think that one necessarily learns about interdisciplinarity by studying interdisciplines. To be sure, the literature on interdisciplinarity has not always stressed that interdisciplines are not necessarily interdisciplinarity. But it has sometimes (Fuchsman 2012 for example). And there has been a more general recognition that interdisciplines often come to behave like disciplines over time. The observation in chapter 7 that three disciplines and three interdisciplines in the social sciences exhibit broadly similar growth trajectories is thus unsurprising. The

fact that the interdiscipline of behavioral genetics has experienced the sort of fragmentation into fields, each with specialized “toolkits,” that we see in disciplines (chapter 5) is likewise unsurprising.

Chapter 6 looks at the study of religion, demography, and research on AIDS. It suggests that movement in both directions between discipline and interdiscipline can be observed. And it stresses the importance of “boundary work” by each in which they actively exclude certain research activities from their purview (another analysis seemingly at odds with the editorial presumption that disciplines facilitate interdisciplinarity) but also sometimes deliberately expand imperialistically into the subject areas of other disciplines (which explains at least some of the cross-disciplinary citations celebrated by the editors).

The editors imagine that chapters 5 through 7 provide evidence against the supposed assumption that “interdisciplinarity is better.” Not only is the assumption misguided but the evidence is in any case not about interdisciplinarity—which of course could only be evaluated if carefully defined.

This book could have been so much better. The analysis in multiple chapters points to the importance of respect for diverse methods as a key defining characteristic of interdisciplinarity; several chapters also point to the importance of a careful appreciation of the nature of disciplines and the ways that these do and do not constrain interdisciplinary activity. The editors might then have pointed to key definitions of interdisciplinarity that in fact stress methodological flexibility and disciplinary perspective (such as those discussed on the AIS website’s

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## Applications Still Being Accepted for Graduate Student Workshop

Applications are still being accepted for the fourth Graduate Student Workshop on Socio-Environmental Synthesis, hosted by the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC) in Annapolis, Maryland from March 7-10, 2017.

As part of this highly interactive workshop, graduate students from across disciplines and from around the world will participate in sessions and activities designed to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, team formation, and scientific proposal development while also building a variety of other skills and best practices crucial to the success of socio-environmental synthesis, including team leadership, effective communication, and familiarity with diverse data types.

First- and second-year doctoral students from social, natural, and computational sciences with strong interests in and potential for synthesis-based research are encouraged to apply by January 13, 2017. There is no cost to attend the Workshop, although space is limited.

The Workshop's opportunity page offers more information about the this event, as well as other graduate-oriented research opportunities supported by SESYNC.

Further information is available from Nicole Motzer, Graduate Student Program Coordinator, National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC), University of Maryland, College Park, Md.

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### Book Review

#### *Continued from page 9*

About Interdisciplinarity pages). If they had taken symbiosis as a starting point, they might have sought to more carefully delineate the circumstances under which interdisciplinarity is especially valuable, rather than tilting at the windmill of imagined universal superiority. Rather than thinking that it was novel to recognize that disciplines occasionally borrow from each other, they might have sought to identify under what conditions they do so and under what other conditions a self-consciously interdisciplinary approach is called for. If not enchanted by an assumption that the literature assumes away at least some institutional barriers to interdisciplinarity, they might instead have sought to identify practical solutions to particular problems—in particular the tenure and promotion standards that interdisciplinary scholarship so desperately needs. Rather than thinking it was novel to appreciate that funding agencies are often misguided in how they advocate and fund interdisciplinary research, the editors might have

built upon many efforts (e.g. Lyall et al. 2011) to guide granting agencies toward better understandings of both disciplines and interdisciplinarity.

More generally, if they had appreciated that the extant literature already recognizes most if not all of their supposed objections, they could have sought to add constructively to that literature. Instead they attacked straw men, and thus likely will do more harm than good to their goal of articulating the true nature of interdisciplinarity for a broad audience. They speak laudably of pursuing a study of interdisciplinarity grounded in theory and empirics; they might have usefully recognized that this project has been underway for some decades. They might have usefully joined the conversation rather than pretending that they were the conversation.

This book is not isolated in its basic misunderstanding of the literature on interdisciplinarity. Julie Thompson Klein recently described in this newsletter (Vol 37, No. 4, Dec. 2015) the “overstated” claims at the heart of Harvey Graff’s *Undisciplining Knowledge*. And Jerry Jacobs (2013) mistakenly equated interdisciplinarity with an

adisciplinary disdain for disciplines. There is scope for a social theoretical exploration of why it is now somewhat popular to attack interdisciplinary strawmen. There is apparently an audience for such works. Whatever the motivations for this literature, it collectively exposes the value of clear definitions of interdisciplinarity, clear expositions of its symbiotic role in the academy, and careful attention to the institutional aspects of interdisciplinarity.

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### A House, Completely Divided?

by John DeCarlo

Nations genuflect upon the defeat of self –  
Socrates eternally tweets: know thyself

But for Freud, there are no abiding fidelities,  
The psychic under-sheets are always over-stocked:

Orgies of mothers, brothers, fathers and sisters

Ex-ex-lovers and, ever wishful fantasies

Some see blue waves, others see red particles

Some see blue particles, others see red waves

Some see a large dark figure navigating  
Like a drunken pilot, crashing us down

Others see the long lost imperial crown,  
Humpty Dumpty back together, again!

Is it as relative as Einstein's scrambled egg:  
Urban yokes contracted, without relief,  
Rural whites elongated, beyond belief?

There are absolute parameters to rays of light:

They will not perpetuate in a black hole --  
Even of the most pristine cave of coal

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### SciTS 2017 Conference

June 12-14, 2017 • Clearwater Beach, FL.

The Science of Team Science (SciTS) is a rapidly growing cross-disciplinary field of study that aims to build an evidence base and to develop translational applications to help maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of team-based research.

The 2017 Science of Team Science Conference will review the current state of knowledge in the SciTS field, highlight applications for enhancing team science, and discuss future directions for advancing SciTS to improve the global scientific enterprise.

The SciTS 2017 Conference (<http://www.scienceofteams-science.org>) will bring together thought leaders in the SciTS field, scientists engaged in team-based research, institutional leaders who promote collaborative research, policy makers, and federal agency representatives.

Links to the call for workshops and abstracts are:

<http://www.scienceofteams-science.org/workshop-submissions>

<http://www.scienceofteams-science.org/call-for-abstracts>

A registration site will be available in January with information regarding conference registration fees and additional travel and lodging details.

Early Bird Registration will also be available starting in January 2017.

### About AIS

The Association for Interdisciplinary Studies is the U.S.-based international professional association devoted to interdisciplinary teaching (including service learning), research, program administration, and public policy. Interdisciplinarity integrates the insights of knowledge domains to produce a more comprehensive understanding of complex problems, issues, or questions. AIS serves as an organized professional voice and source of information on interdisciplinary approaches and the integration of insights from diverse communities to address complex problems in education and research. Founded in 1979, it is incorporated as a non-profit 501(c)3 educational association in the state of Ohio.

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