

CAP115/123  
Spring 2009

## Interdisciplinary Research Project

As a Capital Scholar Honors student you are no stranger to integrative writing and thinking—the essential feature of interdisciplinary research. The approach to interdisciplinarity adopted in both CAP 115 and CAP 123 is congruent with Klein and Newell’s classic definition, which states that interdisciplinary thinking is

*“...a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession (3).”*

Two major examples of interdisciplinary fields that have influenced the intellectual concerns of CAP 123, women and gender studies and African American/African Diaspora Studies, in fact, owe their institutional development as academic fields of study to the political protests of the historical period. We are examining the web of interrelated conflicts, representations, and events of the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, the gay rights movement, and the anti-war movement. The question posed this semester is, “How does what we know about American history look differently once we begin to think about the social goals of these movements and the political needs these activists? And, how then does this knowledge transfer to make democracy and full citizenship a reality for all, regardless of differences of race, gender, class, age, and sexuality?”

**Project Description:** The Interdisciplinary Research Project (IRP) is a collaborative project that includes research, writing, and oral communication, and takes the rest of the semester to complete. You will be teamed with two to three colleagues from your section of CAP 115/123 and you will select a research topic/question to study together. Your research topic should relate to one major theme from the content of CAP 123 and execute the interdisciplinary research steps in Repko’s Chapters 6-12.

**Project Requirements:** The major written texts that you will produce include the following: (1) an annotated bibliography of 4-5 sources; (2) a 6-8 page literature review; (3) an 8-10 page collaborative interdisciplinary essay. The oral component requires that you participate in a panel presentation of your research at the Freshmen Honors Symposium.

**Project Process:**

- (1) **Select a research topic/theme:** Consider what you have learned about the impact of the civil rights movement, the women’s liberation movement, the gay rights movement, and the anti-war movement on American culture and society. How do we see these movements **as related to each other and influenced by each other**, as well as subjected to forces resistant to change by the larger society? Then, draw connections between the movements, the time periods and cultures associated with them. Here is a list of broad themes to guide you in choosing a specific topic:

- Changing perceptions of racial ideologies
- Changing perceptions of gender roles
- Construction of distinct generational identities or affiliations in conflict with each other over values
- Changing ideas of leadership roles or models
- Changing roles of community members in government and society
- Changing definitions of social justice
- Changing definitions of environmental justice
- Challenges to freedom of expression

**(2) Identify and state the *interdisciplinary* problem or question**

Effective criteria for selecting a research topic include the following:

- Represents a complex, real-world problem / idea
- Requires more than one disciplines' knowledge or perspective(s)
- Works well for a collaborative environment

*(Refer to Repko, page 151 for elaboration on the criterion)*

After you have listed a few possible topics, use these questions to help frame your research question:

- Can you clearly and concisely state the problem or question? (You will need to narrow the broad theme and articulate a specific research question.)
- Is it manageable within the limits of this project? (If your question is too big for this project, narrow it more by focusing on a particular aspect of the problem.)
- What is the scope of the problem or question? (What parts of the problem will you attempt to solve in this project? What will you not address in this project because of these limitations?)
- Who cares about the problem or question? (What is its larger context; societal needs?)
- What are your personal biases toward the problem or question? Are these beneficial or a barrier? Is the problem or question open-ended?
- Is it researchable within at least two disciplines?

**(3) Justify an interdisciplinary approach**: On page 151 in the Repko text, refer to the criteria commonly used to justify an interdisciplinary approach. Consider these as questions:

- Is the issue/theme or research question complex?
- Are important insights into the issue offered by two or more disciplines?
- Is the issue one that is of common interest to two or more disciplines? Which ones?
- Does research on the issue have real-world value?

**(4) Identify relevant disciplines and conduct a literature search**: Narrow and focus your research topic or question and articulate it clearly and concisely. Identify two disciplines that are most pertinent in your research and conduct a literature search.

**Each writer will conduct a literature search and write an annotated bibliography and a literature review essay.**

Each annotated bibliography entry should be approximately half a page long. Each entry should contain the following: (1) a citation, (2) a summary of the source, (3) an evaluation of the source that discusses the value of the article to the project, and (4) a

research log. Each team member should take responsibility for annotating and synthesizing 4-5 sources.

Each writer will also compose a literature review—a 6-8 page essay that synthesizes the sources that you annotate in your bibliography and aims to discover disciplinary insights about your research issue/ question.

(Resources for the annotated bibliography and the literature review will be available on BlackBoard.)

- (5) **Compose an interdisciplinary essay**: Once you have reviewed the literature, refine your research focus and create a writing plan with your group. Each group will write an 8-10 page interdisciplinary essay that integrates disciplinary perspectives/insights and produces a new understanding (or cognitive advancement) of the issue. Your collaborative essay should include between 8-12 relevant sources from at least two disciplines. You will want to start by examining each writer's literature search documents for appropriate sources before you decide whether to find additional or different sources. As you prepare your collaborative project, consider these guidelines:
- Share individual literature searches and identify disciplinary insights into the problem;
  - Analyze and evaluate these insights and how you might integrate them in your writing;
  - Identify any conflicts between the insights and how you might address these in your writing;
  - Create or discover common ground between the insights ;
  - Demonstrate your integrated, interdisciplinary discoveries through metaphor or analogy.
- (6) **Write an individual reflective essay**: Each person in the group will write a 1-2 page essay that reflects on and evaluates the collaborative and composing process of this project. In your essay, discuss what you learned from the project, including process and content; identify and evaluate the contributions that each group member made toward the project (including yourself); reflect on what aspects of the project went well and what aspects posed significant challenges for the group; reflect on how the group overcame challenges and focused collaborative energy; reflect on what changes you would make in hindsight.
- (7) **Participate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Freshmen Honors Symposium**: This symposium is a conference-like event where you will present your research to an academic audience. Your group will write an abstract of your presentation and present your research in a panel format. The symposium is scheduled for Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.