

Editors' Introduction

You may have noticed the growing international presence of AIS and this journal over the last decade. Our 2025 conference this year was in Oulu, Finland, another fantastic meeting in Europe after the successful 2019 meeting in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and the first non-U.S. conference in Ottawa, Canada, in 2016. A primary driver of this international collegueship, from the early days of AIS, was Julie Thompson Klein and the many top scholars across the globe that she encouraged. And a crucial lynchpin of this increased international presence for AIS has been Roslyn (Roz) Abt Schindler, probably the most superbly patient and superbly capable conference organizer the world has ever seen. These conferences make for a cozier world for interdisciplinarians globally. She steps down from the AIS Conference Liaison role after 25 years and 25 conferences. Big shoes to fill . . . but Jennifer J. Dellner is ready and able, as she steps down and over to Conference Liaison from her role as AIS President and assumes the important role of Immediate Past President in support of the new President Evan Widders. Julie, AIS founder Bill Newell, and long-time *Issues* editor Gretchen Schulz, would be proud of the international growth of AIS—and we miss them all.

There has been a welcomed (in our opinion and experience) increase in the voices of non-U.S. authors over the last decade in *Issues*, and we expect this expansion to continue. Our journal's impressive Editorial Advisory Board is now international, whereas before 2019 it was U.S. scholars only (thank you, Roz, and Amsterdam conference organizers, where the first meeting of the new board was convened). Our recent 2024, volume 42, a special collection of articles on "Philosophy of Interdisciplinarity," is 11 articles written by scholars representing eight countries—Argentina, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Mexico, The Netherlands, The United States, and Uruguay. Guest Editors, Machiel Keestra and Jan C. Schmidt, are from The Netherlands and Germany, respectively. Also, we have two current calls for papers for special collections, one will be guest edited by Frédéric Darbellay (Switzerland) and Rick Szostak (Canada) on "Politics and Interdisciplinarity." The other is an equally timely, and related, topic of "HBCUs and Interdisciplinarity," edited by Allison Upshaw (Stillman College, USA) and Khadijah O. Miller (Norfolk State University, USA). See our journal website for more information on both special collections. Now, on to the amazing articles in this 2025, Volume 43, Number 1, edition of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*.

Our first author, flourishing at 91 years of age, is a distinguished AIS member for a number of reasons. There can be only one first editor of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*, or "Integrative Studies" as it was titled at the time, and that's Raymond Miller—in 1982, Volume 1, Number 1. He is easily one of the longest running members of the Association for Interdisciplinary Studies, having been awarded a life-time membership early on in gratitude for helping

to keep AIS financially afloat in its fledgling years. He was President of AIS in 1984–85. In 2008, he received the prestigious Boulding Award from AIS. An active interdisciplinary scholar, we are extremely pleased to publish his article, “An AIS Social Scientist’s Career-Long Perspective on Interdisciplinary Studies,” in our 43rd annual volume and in the 46th year of the existence of AIS. Ray, a professor emeritus at San Francisco State University, USA, calls it his “bookend career article” and we call it a marvelous history of interdisciplinarity and social sciences from an insider’s perspective. He draws inspiration from William Newell’s 2008 *Issues* article, “The Intertwined History of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Education and the Association for Integrative Studies: An Insider’s View” (a must read for anyone interested in AIS history and interdisciplinary academic history generally!). The insider notion in Ray’s work denotes both the author’s enduring relationship with AIS and his intellectual evolution within the social sciences. Even in shorter spans of five or 10 years at a time, we see both our AIS organization and our own specialized fields of disciplinary training evolve at a tremendous pace. So readers at any career stage will find both aspects of this insider writing fascinating. Thanks for the gift of remarkable bookends, Ray.

Our second article “Institutional Structures, Barriers, and Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Change in Higher Education” segues exquisitely from our first. U.S. researchers Desen S. Özkan at the University of Connecticut, and Lisa D. McNair, at Virginia Tech, examine “the reasons faculty take on interdisciplinary projects in new course design, the catalysts that drive change initiatives, and the ways faculty are supported and challenged by university systems at different stages of development and implementation.” Cross-disciplinary initiatives are popular at today’s colleges and universities, not only among administrators and politicians, but also among department faculty themselves. And these initiatives matter in our professional lives in all sorts of ways. The authors concisely document a history of interdisciplinary initiatives before presenting their own case study. In a longitudinal study over a four-year period of such an initiative at a large U.S. research university, the authors conduct a narrative analysis, framed by critical theory, on two involved faculty teams (and administrators). They use critical theory to better enable analysis of values, structures, power, and ideologies. One outcome, which we trust many faculty can relate to, is that “Ultimately, advancing interdisciplinary curriculum and collaboration became possible *when people focused on other people* [emphasis added] instead of resisting nameless structures, including both faculty transgressing disciplinary boundaries and administrators working to secure universities in an increasingly market-based economy.” We sort of know this—that things get done well when we focus on each other—but it is easy to forget as we get buried in work with colleagues under the banner of an administration-initiated “interdisciplinary” initiative. Their overall conclusions and implications are positive, and the authors document the ways in

which such positive work on interdisciplinary initiatives can be accomplished. “An oppositional understanding of ‘institution versus faculty’ is misleading and potentially dangerous. In each story of a structural barrier, faculty members and administrators brokered negotiations.”

Our third and fourth articles are excellent examples of SOITL—scholarship of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Two faculty from Texas Woman’s University, USA, Sara Ishii-Bear in visual arts, and Aaron Loeb in nursing, present a remarkably unique cross-disciplinary project between two courses. Their lead question is “What are the experiences of visual art and nursing undergraduate students working on an interdisciplinary collaborative project?” Put another way, what happens when a lone visual art student is tasked with artistically rendering an illness experienced by an aging population—for example, glaucoma, coronary artery disease, breast cancer, etc.—with a team of four nursing students responsible for teaching the visual art student what the disease is and giving critical responses on the artistic rendering as it develops? And all meetings are via Zoom! One can imagine the challenges in teaching and learning for this primary project in each course. A clear challenge is the epistemological distance of the students’ (and professors’) main disciplines. Still, the project was successful by many measures—for example, the 25 artworks with commentaries physically traveled to both campuses and were exhibited there. Ishii-Bear and Loeb discuss challenges, limitations, and of course, successes, weaving in the students’ own reflections about their learning.

Our final article, another SOITL case study, is “Theory Extension as an Integration Strategy: A Case Study Using Sociomaterial Theories and *I, Dolours* in an Interdisciplinary Studies Course” by Nevena Stojanovic, West Virginia University, USA. To teach this integration strategy, she uses the first-person documentary—*I, Dolours*—in which Dolours Price recounts her personal history of becoming a member of the IRA in Northern Ireland, and from this perspective, a history of the IRA itself. Stojanovic writes “The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how theories of collective and sociomaterial learning can be used to examine the complex problem of terrorism as well as teach theory extension as an integration strategy.” She draws from work by Allen Repko, Angus McMurtry, and other interdisciplinarians. On collective and sociomaterial learning, she explains that they do not focus on “an individual as an independent agent of learning,” rather, these learning theories “position other individuals in the learning environment as well as social dynamics, tools, technology, and other elements in the context as inextricable from learning.” The three theories she examined with students are communities of practice theory, cultural-historical activity theory, and actor-network theory. The student experience of extending theories reiterates a key part of how we can think cross-disciplinarily about complex problems. The article highlights the benefits of these theories for interdisciplinary studies and the study of

complex problems: “If sociomaterial theories of learning help us all shed light on complex problems as well as reflect on our own learning,” and “on the methods we acquired, on the hierarchies we inherited, on the routines we developed, and on the ideologies we embraced, we need to engage them more in our interdisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary endeavors.”

We close this “Introduction” with a couple of invitations. First, you read others’ work in these pages, why not yours? In addition to the special collections forthcoming—on HBCUs and interdisciplinarity, and on politics and interdisciplinarity—we are always publishing “regular” articles of interest to interdisciplinarians. Second, we have annual conferences in the planning stages and we hope to see you there! They are 2026 at Florida State University, and 2027 at Kansas State University, all dates to be announced, check our AIS website for updates.

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