

Editors' Introduction

As I introduce the articles in this 2022, Volume 40, Number 2, of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*—which itself begins with my “Tribute to Gretchen Schulz”—know that my beloved co-editor, and her razor-sharp English professor mind, is in each of these articles, just as it is present in anything she edited.

The first article, “Centering Youth Voices: An Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Approach to Civic Engagement,” is an incredibly unique and hopeful article, crafted by a team of scholars and students from Merrimack College, near Boston, Massachusetts. Professors Kirstie Lynn Dobbs, Laura M. Hsu, and Stephanie Garrone-Shufran, were joined by students Nicholas Barber, Fatoumata Kourouma, Yarielis Perez-Castillo, and Samantha Rich in working on “Youth Voices.” Recognizing a disconnection in civic engagement for youth during COVID-19 and other challenges that accompanied the isolation that the pandemic required, they formed a unique research team to help “center youth voices,” especially voices of BIPOC youth. In describing their work, they write,

A group of interdisciplinary faculty and students at Merrimack College formed a research and teaching team that collaborated with the local YMCA located in Lawrence, Massachusetts. The goal of the partnership was to develop and implement a youth civic engagement program to strengthen academic skills and civic engagement among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and multilingual youth.

The team, beginning with the faculty who were later joined by the students, created a “Youth Voice” program for middle schoolers, and formed, delivered, and assessed “an interdisciplinary civic engagement curriculum for our program to enhance civic engagement that focused on the academic, social-emotional, and political engagement of Youth Voice participants.” The authors recount how they arrived, as a team, at an intergenerational definition of “civic engagement.” The definition, as you will read, is “centered upon digital activism, social justice, and individual and collective action.”

Activities the student authors engaged in to help prepare the Youth Voice curriculum included transdisciplinary, civically-engaged research, as the authors describe. Overall “the Youth Voice curriculum was a product of Mode 2 thinking” in interdisciplinary research, which involves “an increasingly context-driven, problem-focused, and interdisciplinary mode of thinking, where researchers are immersed in issues under study, acting as reflexive change agents, applying theory to practice in order to more adequately address the complexity of social problems.” This is in contrast to “Mode 1, an approach to problems that is primarily academic, investigator-initiated, and discipline-based.” The authors discuss how the value of an interdisciplinary approach to enhancing civic engagement became apparent in a follow up focus

group. The authors conclude that “Our research and teaching team found that interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives were key in the development and implementation of Youth Voice.”

In the second article, Stephanie R. deLusé and David A. Thomas, faculty members at Arizona State University, in Tempe, Arizona, provide another unique entry for the scholarship of interdisciplinary teaching and learning literature. “Designing Faculty-Led Study Abroad Programs with Internships to Enhance Interdisciplinary Curricula” adds to previous interdisciplinary studies research about study abroad to show how to successfully plan and execute a powerful study abroad experience for interdisciplinary students by including an internship component. The authors argue, cogently, that including an international internship experience in study abroad makes for the highest impact possible in the experience, and that “such programming should have a place in interdisciplinary curricula and program development.” They should know—together they have led over 350 students through 14 internship-based study abroad programs in five countries. The authors admit that “Mounting a faculty-led study abroad program with internships is a time-consuming, multi-faceted endeavor that in itself is an interdisciplinary-style challenge for the faculty member who seeks to create it.” Their article’s purpose, then (and they put this mildly given the wealth of useful information they provide) is to “offer some insights on how one might do it and expand on why it is of value to the interdisciplinary student.”

Their practical advice for incorporating internships in study abroad programs, and therefore for planning and executing study abroad programs in the first place, is phenomenal and replete with examples. A certain wisdom comes with so much experience in leading study abroad with internship opportunities for students over so many years, and the authors are adept in sharing it in the most useful way possible. After providing research that shows the value of the double impact of faculty-led study abroad with internship, and how to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach in the experiences for students, the authors describe “Commencing Program Design,” including, planning, service provider considerations, working with a study abroad office, and creating a budget. Next, “Pre-Departure Implementation” includes recruiting, selection, and pre-departure orientation meeting and assignments. And a final section is “Post-Departure Implementation.” The authors hope that this article will reduce the perceived complexity in all components of faculty-led study abroad programs with internships. They conclude that,

While approaches will differ from program to program, what the students learn as they prepare for, engage in, and reflect on the multi-faceted experience can be intentionally interdisciplinary with the help of committed faculty who are willing to take on the extra challenge of mounting this double-layered high-impact opportunity for their students.

This article is a service for faculty who have already committed to faculty-led study abroad programs with internships or those thinking of doing so in the future.

The final three articles are a continuation of our Forum on Repko and Szostak's (2021) *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*, first published in 2022, Volume 40, Number 1, of this journal. In introducing the first four articles in our last edition, Gretchen and I wrote,

We have been especially gratified by the multiple articles submitted in response to our mid-pandemic call for articles on teaching with *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* [Repko & Szostak, 2021], the textbook most in use by interdisciplinarians around the world. . . . In accordance with our frequent focus on material that advances the Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning (or SOITL), we invited those who have taught with the text (at any level, in any sort of program) to report on their experiences in doing so, discussing ways it's been especially useful, and/or ways it has failed to serve them well, and/or ways they've addressed any problems with its use.

The authors of those articles were: Benjamin Brooks, Kennesaw State University on information literacy; Rhonda Davis, Northern Kentucky University on mapping; Rafi Rashid, National University of Singapore on postgraduate education; and Machiel Keestra and Anne Uilhoorn, University of Amsterdam, and Jelle Zandveld, Utrecht University, on the Amsterdam Institute textbook. With this current publication, there are now seven articles in response to our call for papers on *Interdisciplinary Research*, four in Volume 40(1) just described and three in Volume 40(2) that will now be introduced, including a response from textbook co-author Rick Szostak.

The first of the newer articles is "Two Central Challenges that Arise in an Introduction to Interdisciplinarity Module (and Responses to Them)" by Simon Scott, from the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. Scott contextualizes the two challenges in light of learning goals in an introductory interdisciplinary course for students from various majors. A course goal is that students learn an interdisciplinary research process that can support them in carrying out independent work they will be doing in completing the degree. He writes,

The first challenge is the heavy burden placed on students to develop adequacy in disciplines with which they might be unfamiliar, in addition to learning a new research process and the advanced skills involved in integration.

Scott has found that incorporating group work and rearranging the "Steps" of the interdisciplinary research process, as presented by Repko and Szostak, helps lighten the heavy burden that comes from trying to achieve disciplinary

adequacy. Specifically, he moves up “Step 3, Identify Relevant Disciplines” to be first. Scott states,

A key feature of the module design is that the Steps are introduced in quick succession, and often practiced in tandem (Steps 1–4 in the first 3 weeks, Steps 5 and 6 in weeks 4–8). This is advantageous in an introductory module because, despite Repko and Szostak’s counsel—“Throughout the research process, you should expect to revisit earlier work” (p. 80)—students tend to view the process as linear and the progression to the next Step to be finite. The nature of the group work supports this observation because collaboration determines the pace of each student’s progression, meaning they must collectively revisit and practice earlier Steps together, and cannot progress through the Steps too quickly.

Scott observes that “The second challenge is the late appearance, in the process [Step 8 of 10], of creating the common ground.” Being creative can be a formidable challenge on its own for many students, and since this creative step occurs late, they do not get a chance to practice it very much. At this point, Scott makes sure to stress with students previous steps, especially Steps 6 and 7. But he does it by setting up a student-led seminar. “The student who is the seminar leader compares and contrasts disciplinary insights (Step 6) with each group member in turn, and they identify conflicts between insights (Step 7).” Scott arranges a seminar in which the responsibility for success is shared between the seminar student-leader and other students in the group: “Other group members are encouraged to participate in each discussion, as they offer contrasting perspectives via their own disciplines, which help them critically reflect the insights being discussed.” He describes how all of this is followed by a productive focus group exercise. Scott intriguingly concludes that one major finding of his work with students and this text is that it is valuable for students to experience being an (interdisciplinary) stranger in a homeland. He writes,

A student majoring in political sciences, for example, relates to this discipline differently as an interdisciplinarian than when they are in a political science class. There is something inherently unsettling about the higher-order skills practiced by an interdisciplinarian: critically reflecting on a discipline so that discussions focus on the discipline itself as well as what it reveals about something; thinking comparatively across disciplines so that disciplinary perspectives are considered, not in isolation, but always in relations that reveal new strengths and weaknesses; and thinking creatively by bringing disciplinary insights into new relations. . . . The interdisciplinarian is a stranger in a homeland. Experiencing this disorientation is what is most valuable about the module, although I would struggle to find a student who shared this view.

Since so many professional interdisciplinarians are initially trained deeply in one or two disciplines, being an interdisciplinary stranger in a (disciplinary)

homeland is something we can relate to well. Bill Newell said many times that critical thinking in interdisciplinary studies is at least being able to think critically about disciplines, even the one you hold most dear.

Marcus Tanner, in “Scaffolding Repko and Szostak’s *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*,” describes his experiences using the Repko and Szostak textbook, and his own textbook, along with AIS conferences and collegiality, to re-create a curriculum that purported to be interdisciplinary but was not. The result is a “scaffolding” of students’ learning and the curriculum learning objectives into a truly integrative and interdisciplinary experience. Tanner recounts his time as director of integrative studies at Texas Tech University, in Lubbock, Texas. Many of us, whether as instructors or administrators, have been faced with the kind of problems that Tanner discovers as he takes on his new position—no one knows what interdisciplinary teaching and learning really is, even if the program has the name “interdisciplinary.” And Tanner includes himself in this grouping, since he was hired for his expertise in teaching and learning, not interdisciplinarity. As he says, “Almost immediately, it was recognized that interdisciplinary and integrative curriculum was not a concept anyone was familiar with or ready to implement.” That’s one reason why his account of the 11 year journey to create a vibrant and successful interdisciplinary program is so valuable to *Issues* readers. Tanner’s article includes really helpful before and after comparisons of course descriptions, course learning objectives, how new courses filled an existing gap, and more. Throughout the descriptions, he shows how the Repko and Szostak text was used, as well as how his own text *Introduction to Integrative Studies* (2021), now in its third edition, was developed and used, and why it was needed. Tanner also includes a section on the importance to the program of using the VALUE rubric on Integrative Learning (AAC&U, 2009). In reflection, Tanner writes,

To go from a relatively unknown program on campus with fewer than 40 students to one of the largest degree programs at Texas Tech University has not been without its challenges. . . . We believe we have been able to utilize the resources of AIS and AAC&U to develop a framework for undergraduate integrative learning and interdisciplinary research that has value for our graduates.

As said above, interdisciplinary administrators and instructors alike will enjoy and learn from Tanner’s remarkable story.

The final article is really a commentary by Rick Szostak, from the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Canada, on the six articles that discuss Repko and Szostak *Interdisciplinary Research*. The first thing one notices in “Comments on the Forum on Repko and Szostak” is that Szostak is genuinely appreciative of all the feedback that the authors have provided on the book: “Each of the authors deserves to be applauded for thinking deeply about what they are trying to achieve in the classroom, and then about how best to achieve these

goals. Allen and I have learned much from these papers, and will build on their insights in the next edition of our book.” He says,

There is a general lesson in the group of articles as a whole: that instructors can use the book in many ways, tailored both to their particular institution and program, and to their own strengths and preferences. This reflects the obvious but oft-disputed fact that interdisciplinarity operates in a very similar fashion regardless of the precise questions addressed and disciplines engaged.

Szostak proceeds in his article to engage each author’s main points and so there is no need to recount that here. But it is worthwhile to include here the ultimate paragraph of the “Commentary.”

Scholarship is a conversation. Our textbook has evolved over the years as we have responded to advice from instructors, referees, and the growing literature on interdisciplinarity. Allen and I thank all of the authors in this forum for furthering this conversation. We have learned much from it, and are confident that other interdisciplinary scholars will also have learned much.

This is the first time this journal has approached SOITL with a call for papers like this, and it has been a rewarding experience for the editors’ as well.

I am alone in writing this “Introduction” to our second number of the 40th Volume of *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. But my co-editor of six years, Gretchen Schulz, has been over my shoulder and in my head at every moment . . . a lovely experience. I enter her name here for the last time, as co-editor, in deep respect and deep sadness.

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