

Editors' Introduction

As our worlds continue to emerge from the shadows of the 2020 global pandemic, AIS is doing its part to bring the light of interdisciplinarity to hearts and minds—in person. We started in 2022, in the center of wine country, with the 44th Annual AIS Conference hosted by Sonoma State University in California. At our 2023, 45th Annual AIS Conference in Lubbock, Texas, the home of our publisher Texas Tech University Press, we embraced the rich and diverse culture of the southwest United States. The 2025 Annual AIS Conference is being planned for June 4–6 at the University of Oulu in Finland. Why summer instead of our usual fall conference? Finland in winter is beautiful but less predictable for travel and for enjoying all that Oulu, Finland has to offer. Alas, we will have a robust fall 2024 Virtual AIS Conference, September 27–28, so that no one misses out on their fall interdisciplinary studies conference desires. Future in person conferences are in the planning stages for the United States in 2026 and 2027. See the AIS website for details. The point is that we are back, together, in person (mostly), again.

It was this rich history of AIS over the years that inspired our current president, Jennifer J. Dellner, a professor at Ocean County College, USA, in her keynote address at our AIS 45th anniversary at the 2023 Lubbock, Texas conference. At the journal Editors' urging, she has agreed to share it more widely with this journal readership. If you were there, and we hope you were, you will enjoy experiencing it again. If you were not there, here it is!

Our first article, "Ecological Metaphors in Organizational Science: An Interdisciplinary Critique," is by Matthew M. Mars and Judith L. Bronstein, both from the University of Arizona, USA. These authors draw on their interdisciplinary collaborations to discuss how we can all sharpen the metaphors we use in our research. They describe themselves: "One of us is a sociologist who researches community and organizational innovation. The other of us is an ecologist who studies interactions within and among non-human species." In collaboration, what happens when we discover a metaphor in one discipline that would be enlightening for our research in the second discipline, possibly leading to interdisciplinary common ground of distinct disciplinary insights and some sort of integration? They point out that the metaphors of the "source discipline" may not be ready-made to extend to the "target discipline." As they say, "Consequently, the meaning of research metaphors is often left under-developed or is fundamentally misaligned with the concepts and principles that are being drawn from source disciplines." The article is about metaphor development in research and how it can be made more precise, replete with examples of how this development can work across "source" and "target" disciplines. Their work is motivated by this primary observation: "We have observed throughout our work together that research metaphors are rarely developed and applied through interdisciplinary collaborations

that include scholars in the disciplines in which content is sourced and the disciplines in which the content targets.” Their goal in the article “is to model a collaborative process for developing and applying more purposeful and precise metaphors during integrative interdisciplinary research.”

Our next two articles are excellent examples of SOITL—scholarship of interdisciplinary teaching and learning—and both feature high-impact educational practices. Darien Ripple, a professor from Grand Valley State University, USA, links design thinking and interdisciplinary teaching and learning in “Design Thinking: Chasing the What If.” Ripple provides a case study of a partnership between his university and a local brewery “to design, develop, market, and distribute a ‘Born and Brewed in Michigan’ beer.” The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary project proceeds over three semesters in the same “INT-323: Design Thinking to Meet Real-World Need” course, but the students who work on the project change each semester. The new students pick up where the previous students left off, all the while learning and applying design thinking in the project. Ripple argues that this relatively new adaptation of design thinking into academic courses should be more widespread, especially as higher education comes under increasing scrutiny for relevancy in some quarters. He writes that this case study “reinforces the need for scholarship into the best practices for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaching and learning involving design thinking courses in academic fields.” In the article, the perspectives and voices of the students and the brewery employees, as well as the author, reveal that the entire teaching and learning experience is transformative for all involved.

The transdisciplinary approach in INT-323—applying theory into practice by engaging students in innovative problem solving through the implementation of human-centered design by incorporating empathy and creativity—draws from an interdisciplinary approach of holistic thinking (Repko & Szostak, 2021) which enhances the ability of students to solve a real-world need. Students demonstrated an ability to research and produce a beer, though the skills learned can be transferred into other projects.

This transferable skill Ripple calls “chasing the what if.” And one cannot leave major (non-interdisciplinary studies) courses alone to teach the collaboration needed for such a project and the imagination needed to succeed. Says an advertising and public relations major, “The concept that I learned that will be the most useful in the years to come will be the importance in telling a story and the need for collaboration in the creative process.” Likewise, a communication science and disorders major reports “learning the importance of collaboration and innovation” and a marketing major values “learning about teamwork and a finance major about empathy” in the course.

”Troubling Leadership in the Interdisciplinary Challenge-Based Classroom” by M. Winter and David Overend, both from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, is another SOITL gem that gives an account of high-impact

educational practices. As the authors explain, “troubling is the unearthing or undermining of existing hegemonic assumptions about a concept.” This article is a case study that “troubles models and conceptualisations of leadership in Students as Change Agents (SACHA), an interdisciplinary challenge-based course.” In SACHA, “students work in small groups made up of members across disciplines in response to a prompt [on a complex social issue] given from an external partner at the beginning of the term.” Learning outcomes emphasize themes of being a “change agent.” Since the origination of the course in 2019, more than 30 external partners have contributed to the program’s success (now in the Edinburgh Futures Institute), with over 1200 students enrolling. It is now a required, first-year course in the interdisciplinary degree in this Institute. Something unique about SACHA is that instructors are designated as “coaches,” and can include faculty, post-doctorate tutors, and staff. The diversity of backgrounds of coaches and coaching styles creates a complex tapestry for “troubling” leadership, and articulating the importance of leadership, in an interdisciplinary classroom. The authors use this course to highlight how the role of coach (instead of lecturer, etc.) can destabilize familiar patterns for teamwork and leadership in the interdisciplinary classroom, and they emphasize how disciplinary commitments can affect ideas of leadership. Their research leads to characterizing interdisciplinary leadership in this context as

“as a temporal sensibility where interdisciplinary teamwork requires a high degree of flexibility and responsiveness” and “a sensibility that can be taken up, put down, passed around, and shared by any and all members.” The authors conclude that “Theories of leadership ought to evolve as pedagogical approaches continue to respond to a changing world, especially in the context of technology like large language models and AI.” And the concept of temporal sensibility—temporality of leadership—should be part of that evolution.

Rafi Rashid, National University of Singapore, Singapore, and Rick Szostak, University of Alberta, Canada (and former co-editor of this journal), team up to assess and imagine interdisciplinary graduate curricula in “Desiderata for Graduate Interdisciplinarity Teaching.” After discussing the nature of interdisciplinarity and the research process, including the roles of imagination and creativity, the authors bring out similarities and differences between undergraduate and graduate use of research methods. They also compare disciplinary and interdisciplinary attitudes and needs in doing research, all in light of what graduate interdisciplinary students and programs should attend to. Graduate students, as most every professional in interdisciplinary studies already knows, must grapple with misunderstandings from others about how interdisciplinarity is different than disciplinarity. Since our research involves complex problems or issues, “The interdisciplinary graduate student should recognize that complexity [in the interdisciplinary research process] creates another set of challenges in persuasion.” Another burden of interdisciplinary

graduate students and the programs that serve them is the high level of adequacy expected in generating or articulating disciplinary insights used in the research process. The authors recommend that each graduate student contextualize the depth and breadth of this adequacy with future careers or research paths in mind. Being familiar with team research and with the philosophy of science are also useful in successfully transitioning from graduate school to publication and a career. In the final part of the article, the authors helpfully discuss what some interdisciplinary graduate courses and programs do, or could, look like.

As said at the outset, we are excited to be in full swing again in our conferences and we hope to see you virtually in fall 2024 and in person at the University of Oulu, Finland, June 2025.

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