

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor  
for Academic Affairs  
Swanlund Administration Building  
601 East John Street  
Champaign, IL 61820



December 17, 2014

Self-Study on Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Learning

Barbara Hancin-Bhatt, Associate Dean, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Co-Chair  
Leonard Pitt, Professor, Computer Science, Co-Chair  
Matthew Ando, Professor and Chair, Mathematics  
Lilya Kaganovsky, Associate Professor, Slavic Languages and Literature  
Cris Mayo, Professor, Education Policy, Organization and Leadership  
Robert Pahre, Professor, Political Science  
Nathan Sanden, Associate Director of Residential Life, Housing  
Kimberly Shinew, Professor, Recreation Sport and Tourism  
David Weightman, Professor, Art and Design  
Alex Winter-Nelson, Professor, Agricultural and Consumer Economics  
Kristi Kuntz, Office of the Provost, *ex officio*

Dear Colleagues:

Thank you for agreeing to serve on the Self-Study on Undergraduate Interdisciplinary Learning, one of the high-priority initiatives that has emerged from the ongoing Campus Conversation on Undergraduate Education. Professor Leonard Pitt, Computer Science, and Barbara Hancin-Bhatt, Associate Dean for Student Academic Affairs in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, have agreed to chair your committee.

I ask that all members of your committee read the *First-Round Report* of the Campus Conversation on Undergraduate Education ([http://provost.illinois.edu/docs/C-CUE\\_FA13\\_Report.pdf](http://provost.illinois.edu/docs/C-CUE_FA13_Report.pdf)), to be informed on campus thinking so far.

Both the Fall 2013 round of conversations and the subsequent working groups were emphatic in regarding interdisciplinary learning opportunities as a signature feature of undergraduate education at a world-class research institution, as well as an invaluable opportunity for our students. The task of your committee is to examine how our campus structure and the incentives it affords work to enhance or inhibit interdisciplinary undergraduate learning.

By interdisciplinary learning we have in mind teaching and learning opportunities that cross disciplinary, department, and/or college boundaries. This might take the form of individual courses that cross such boundaries, but it might also take the form of minors that enable students in one college or discipline to earn a minor in another college or discipline. (Since the campus already has plans in motion for the facilitating of dual degrees, we are not asking this committee to revisit that route to interdisciplinary learning.)

I have arranged for Kristi Kuntz of the Provost's Office to join your committee as an *ex officio* member in order to assist you with any questions you have or information you wish to gather on current practices.

I ask the committee to:

1. Explore and evaluate the institutional structures that currently create the environment for interdisciplinary undergraduate learning at the course level. These should include both the current model for distribution of instructional units (“IU”s) to units or departments (including the flow of such revenue from college to department) as well as campus culture and student perceptions of interdisciplinary opportunities.<sup>1</sup>
  - a. Do these structures inhibit team teaching and other ways of designing courses across disciplinary, department, and college boundaries? If so, explain why.
  - b. What can be done to create a smooth path to facilitating interdisciplinary teaching as well as an outcome that is fair to and sustainable for all institutional participants?
  - c. What other ideas can you recommend for enhancement of interdisciplinary teaching and learning?
2. My office will help your committee obtain information about the number and type of undergraduate minors earned in the last few years. Using this information as one resource, please explore and evaluate the status of minors on our campus.
  - a. To what extent does the present pattern of undergraduate minors, in terms of both availability and utilization, enhance interdisciplinary learning on our campus?
  - b. What does this data, or any other information you collect, suggest about students’ perceptions and use of minors?
  - c. Should incentives be offered to departments and units that offer minors in order to expand their offering and/or enrollment and cover the costs of their administration?
  - d. What other ideas can you recommend for optimizing the availability and use of minors in ways that promote interdisciplinary undergraduate learning?

I ask that you begin work immediately, use the next several weeks to identify relevant data that could be collected and analyzed over the summer, and continue your work in the fall semester. Please submit your report by November 15, 2015.

Thank you for your contribution to this important work.

Sincerely,



Ilesanmi Adesida  
Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost

c: Charles Tucker, Lauren Goodlad, Amy Edwards

---

<sup>1</sup> While a thoroughly study of campus culture and student perception might require a large-scale survey, I ask that you instead gather answers to basic questions from a representative sample of department officers and deans and then state in your report if you think additional research is necessary. A student focus group to assess student perception is certainly in order if you think that would be helpful (see also item 2b).