

## Editors' Introduction

It has been 25 years since Stanley Fish published a provocative piece entitled “Being Interdisciplinary Is So Very Hard to Do” in *Profession*, a journal of the Modern Language Association, a piece AIS reprinted in this journal (then *Issues in Integrative Studies*) in 1991. He found his own argument so persuasive he concluded it by insisting that being interdisciplinary is not just hard to do but is impossible—though it should be noted that along the way he also argued that being interdisciplinary is so very easy to do that most of us are doing it most of the time—in some version or other—both in our teaching and in our research. The intervening years have not erased such views from the minds of academics who ought to know better. And indeed, some minds still hold *both* views, however “fishy” thinking so contradictory may be. Both of your co-editors have recently heard otherwise intelligent and informed faculty from our own institutions say *both* things—sometimes in a single breath. But we’d agree that Rick Szostak, current president of AIS, is probably correct in observing that “the challenge to interdisciplinarity in today’s academy is no longer primarily from [those] who claim that it is impossible to do good interdisciplinary [work].” The greater challenge may be the “far more insidious claim” that we’ve heard from our colleagues, the claim that “we are all interdisciplinary now” and that it is *not* “so very hard to do” (“About Interdisciplinarity,” AIS Website).

So how are we to meet this challenge? Well, we can respond to the rallying cry of President Szostak, to be found in the section of the Association website called “About Interdisciplinarity,” the same section cited above. We can “proclaim interdisciplinary best practices” lest we “be swamped by superficial interdisciplinarity.” We can present at conferences (ours and others’) and publish in journals (ours and others’) and books (whenever possible), explaining (again and again) what *real* interdisciplinarity entails, and why it *is* so hard to do, but how it *can* be done, and done *well*, and why that effort *is* worth it in the end. We’re delighted that each and every one of the articles in this 32<sup>nd</sup> volume of *Issues* has got what it takes to assist interdisciplinarians who are fighting the good fight for high quality IDS and IDR in the academy and beyond. We think it may also have what it takes to prompt confused critics of interdisciplinarity like Professor Fish (and our piscine colleagues) to reconsider their views. If we can just get the volume into their hands . . .

Certainly Carolyn Haynes, whose plenary presentation from the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference of our Association, hosted by Miami University last fall, constitutes the first of the articles in this volume, addresses the fact that

being interdisciplinary is hard to do—for teachers and students both. As she explains in this lively account of her own career at Miami, “Biting into the Yellow Pepper: The Development of the Interdisciplinary Learner,” she herself was just such a learner, and *had* to be, since she arrived at Miami so unprepared to teach the IDS courses she had been hired to teach. (Sound familiar?) As she says, “I actually had no self-conscious awareness of how my work or thinking were interdisciplinary, nor did I have any clue about how to assist students to think or learn in interdisciplinary ways.” Of course, she learned what she needed to learn to claim capacity as an interdisciplinarian—and to help her students do the same. When she shifted into a leadership role in the University Honors Program, she took her appreciation for interdisciplinary work with her, and in fact instituted programming even more integrative than that that characterizes interdisciplinary work, bridging divides “such as high school and college, general education and the major, introductory and advanced levels, experiences inside and outside the classroom, [and] theory and practice, [as well as] disciplines and fields.” (She’s quoting Julie Klein.) She suggests that those teaching in a learning environment so integrative, so interdisciplinary-plus, can be compared to the chefs she used to watch on *Iron Chef*, where Kaga, the master of them all, would urge the impassioned experimentation of participants by biting into a yellow pepper and hollering, “*Allez, cuisine!* Go, cook!” And she closes by urging us, “*Allez, enseignez!* Go, teach!” How helpful that she’s provided so many tips on how to do so . . . well.

In the second of our articles, it’s Marilyn Tayler who’s offering helpful tips, indeed, in this case, a fully developed description of a most effective means to the end of good interdisciplinary work. She explains how she moves her entry-level students “From [Mere] Multipdisciplinarity to [Full] Interdisciplinarity” in “[A] Course Involving the Status of Arab Citizens of Israel.” And it won’t surprise most of you to learn that she’s able to do so by a best practice we have come to call “Teaching with Repko.” You may know that Tayler has published on “Teaching with Repko” before, in a chapter on a course involving Jewish marriage in Israel in *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research* (2012), but this time she’s teaching with Allen Repko’s newest text, the *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* (2014) he has published with co-authors Rick Szostak and Michelle Phillips Buchburger. And this time she’s touting that text and its discussion of IDS and IDR as perfectly suited to students who’ve had little or no prior experience of interdisciplinarity (and teachers who might benefit from its introductory nature, as well). The fact that the course Tayler is describing involves the application of the Repko process to a topic as timely and important as the status of Arab citizens in Israel is a bonus; she’s teaching all of us to think in

interdisciplinary ways about this subject even as she's describing teaching her students to do the same.

How to do the hard work of teaching interdisciplinary studies to undergraduates is the subject of the third of our articles, too. But this time the authors broaden their focus well beyond their personal experience in IDS classrooms. This time they're speaking of an IDS program (the Integrated Studies Program) that has been available to first year students at the University of North Dakota for 27 years now. As explained by Tami Carmichael, long-time director of the ISP, and her co-author and long-time colleague, Yvette LaPierre, the students who enroll in the ISP enter a learning community that introduces them to interdisciplinary and integrative work from the get-go, providing a foundation in such approaches that has been demonstrated to be good grounding for the work they do in the rest of their academic careers, whether that work continues to be interdisciplinary and integrative or not. And please let us draw attention to the all-important phrase we have just used: "has been demonstrated." What's really remarkable about this article is that it not only *asserts* the value of the program it describes. It also *proves* its value—by reporting the results of an assessment process it *also* describes. Both the program and the process are inspiring models for those busy being interdisciplinary—even though it is so very hard to do. As the title of the article proclaims, "Interdisciplinary Learning Works."

With the fourth of our articles, we move from the challenges of being interdisciplinary at the undergraduate level to those of being so at the graduate level. The co-authors, a faculty member from Union University and three of the students who completed a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies under his aegis, describe the integration of interdisciplinary and qualitative research practices that characterizes the three-course sequence at the heart of the program and then illustrate its instantiation in a version of the sequence that took this student cohort to Oman to work with the Bedouin population there. In "Interdisciplinarity, Qualitative Research, and the Complex Phenomenon: Toward an Integrative Approach to Intercultural Research," Professor Phillip Ryan and students Jill Sornson Kurtz, Deanne Carter, and Danielle Pester (all themselves now teaching in IDS programs of one sort or another) offer ample evidence that this hybridized approach to research yields the "thick, rich description" (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of complex phenomena that intercultural researchers seek. And, like Tayler's article, this one also offers an illuminating look into a far away part of the world where much of general interest is going on—much that can probably best be understood by trained interdisciplinarians.

In our fifth article, "Professional Identity and Participation in Interprofessional Community Collaboration," another set of multiple

authors take on the issue of professional identity, thereby moving beyond interdisciplinary work in academe (at the undergraduate and graduate levels) to interdisciplinary work in the real world where (we quote from the abstract) “Collaboration is now frequently required among representatives of myriad disciplines to intervene more effectively in complex community and public health problems.” That fact means even those whose academic training was largely disciplinary, prompting their identification with some one particular profession, do have to function in an interdisciplinary way. Co-authors Marcia Bayne-Smith, Terry Mizrahi, Yossi Korazim-Körösy, and Martha Garcia explore how such real-world experience of interdisciplinarity has impacted sense of identity among the 50 professionals from six different disciplines involved in the study that yielded this article. Among other conclusions, they proffer the conclusion that more training in how to do that hard thing, interdisciplinarity, when professionals are still *pre*-professionals, still *in* training, would be a very good thing, indeed.

In the sixth of our articles, still further assertion of the value of studying interdisciplinary methods before leaving the academy for the real world (and perhaps at intervals thereafter) reveals the “alliance of two separate but similarly-oriented professional communities,” those of the policy sciences and interdisciplinary studies. Like Smith, Mizrahi, Korazim-Körösy, and Garcia, like, in fact, the authors of all of the preceding articles, authors Richard L. Wallace and Susan G. Clark recognize integrative problem solving as very hard to do—but less hard to do when those involved have training and/or experience in interdisciplinary approaches to the work. In “Convergent Evolution in the Interest of Integrative Problem-solving: Connecting the Policy Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies,” they argue that study in the policy sciences can and does prepare professionals working in the real world—trying to deal with complex problems—to do such work well precisely because it does teach them how to integrate multiple perspectives using the same processes that characterize interdisciplinarity. As they point out, “A review of the policy sciences in the context of interdisciplinary studies emphasizes their shared heritage and raises important questions about how isolated communities of scholars and practitioners with a convergent evolution might collaborate to promote greater achievement of their common goals.”

Of course, as we have seen, the “common goals” we interdisciplinarians share with policy scientists are complemented by the common means to the ends of our common goals that we also share, not least, the methods by which interdisciplinarians and policy scientists alike discover or create the “common ground” necessary if the integrative work in which we both believe is to proceed and proceed well. Appropriately, then, we end this

volume with an explicit study of the subject of “common ground.” In our seventh and final article, “Interdisciplinary Common Ground: Techniques and Attentional Processes,” author P. Sven Arvidson offers insight into the “attentional” acts that make what’s hard to do possible to do—and do well—namely, discovering or creating “common ground,” which he describes as allowing the all important “pivot from disciplinary to interdisciplinary perspective.” Assuming that “research in the traditional areas of psychology – attention, memory, imagination, perception, learning, emotion, intuition, consciousness – can shed light on the process of creating common ground and on integrative interdisciplinarity in general,” he “attempts to advance this task by focusing on attention in interdisciplinary common ground, especially in terms of two descriptive approaches to consciousness, Gestalt psychology and philosophical phenomenology.” “Four common ground techniques [with which we’re familiar from other IDS literature]— extension, redefinition, transformation, organization – are characterized as modifications of attention using Gestalt theoretical principles and phenomenology.” And the processes involved are illustrated in a wonderfully accessible way by examples drawn from work students have done for Professor Arvidson. So enjoy--this final article and everything else in this volume. That, at least, is something that *should* be (and we think *will* be) very easy to do.

Pauline Gagnon  
Chair and Professor of the Department of Theatre  
College of Arts and Humanities  
University of West Georgia  
Carrollton, Georgia, USA

Gretchen Schulz  
Professor Emerita of English  
Oxford College of Emory University  
Oxford, Georgia, USA