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Introduction to Special Issue on
Interdisciplinary Resources

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Chair / Scribe of the SVHE Task Force Report on Interdisciplinary Studies

THE SPONSOR OF the Report on Interdisciplinary Studies, namely the Association of American Colleges (AAC), has been a strong force on behalf of excellence in American higher education. Several important reports have helped shape academic perceptions across the nation, and features of the AAC journal, *Liberal Education*, such as the "On Campus with Women" section, serve campuses uniquely and helpfully.

No wonder then that AAC would again obtain foundation funding and undertake an extensive three-year project leading to a two-volume national report on a crucial aspect of American higher education, the liberal arts major. Of course one of the first things that becomes evident is the recent nature of the major (or "study in depth," as the AAC materials named it): we are talking about a phenomenon less than fifty years old, but one which nonetheless drives most collegiate programs today. Recognizing that we weren't dealing with hoary tradition sacred to academia in all times and places was one of the insights that freed task force members to consider a wide range of possible revampings of the college academic experience. We surveyed and analyzed many existing programs, sought to forecast future trends, and made recommendations for policies and structures (details of these stages of the project are spelled out in ihe longer version of the Report published here).

Because of a long-standing collaboration between AAC and the Society for Values in Higher Education (SVHE) and the fact that many SVHE members work in interdisciplinary contexts, AAC asked the Society to convene a task force for analysis of the interdisciplinary studies major. 1 ended up carrying the banner for the Society, well aided by other members listed below, and by two officers of the Association for Integrative Studies, Julie Thompson Klein and Constance Ramirez. Through Klein and Ramirez we tapped into the AIS for consultation and advice — the AIS philosophy network, for instance, responded to an early draft of the report, as did a number of SVHE members. I am grateful that the two organizations, SVHE and AIS, have been able to co-operate on preparation of the report, and now on publication and dissemination of this expanded resource, subvented by the Ford Foundation and Quinnipiac College.

Clearly what you have in your hands is one of the most extensive practical studies of interdisciplinary studies to date, along with specific and concrete administrative advice. "Access to tools," to be sure — as in Klein's bibliographical survey here and her massive *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory, and Practice* (Wayne State UP, 1990) — but also in William Newell's reflections on interdisciplinary curriculum development and Beth Casey's analysis of and suggestions for administration of interdisciplinary programs. Nelson Bingham provides a helpful directory to facilitate networking connections. All told, together with the reprinted article by Hursh, Haas, and Moore, you hold here guidance that will be useful across the nation as interdisciplinary studies moves into the twentieth-first century.

All of us directly involved in the preparation of the report learned a great deal from recommended readings and from each other. The AAC design worked out by project director Carole Schneider allowed face-to-face meetings that were crucial; additional evaluation by and advice from other faculty and administrators were also freely given, and proved most helpful. The sort of synergy one hopes will take place in interdisciplinary academic settings accompanied our own task force work, as we repeatedly shared information about our own widely-varied campus sites and interdisciplinary experiences, and as we worked alongside the other task forces during our national conferences. More than once we found structural or substantive insights in the drafts of the other reports, and I've noted that some of our own findings are reflected in the final reports from the other task forces — especially since we and the Women's Studies task force were charged with speaking across the disciplinary specialties to the other task force groups.

The various drafts of the report carried sometimes more and sometimes less political edge; ultimately we press American educators to take interdis-

ciplinary studies more seriously, and argue that the field must not be left to random wandering about and rediscovering elementary wheels, when there are now so many and such excellent published resources. Of course along the way we had to deal with all sorts of definitional issues, and to respond to the national advisory committee's charges, but the final report goes beyond merely identifying where interdisciplinary studies are happening in order to treat a number of issues that studies of other majors (and programs) did not have to treat. See in the report our emphasis upon the campus-wide aspects and our statements of concern about faculty involvement or student assessment; and please note our recommendations to both administrators and faculty members.

This issue of *Issues in Integrative Studies*, "Interdisciplinary Resources" may be the first such publication to go beyond merely sharing anecdotal information and surveys of types of programs and curricula to evaluation, synthesis, and political recommendations. Aware of the chronological youth of some interdisciplinary programs, authors in this issue also reflect maturation across the field as they draw from a rich fund of actual experiences rather than spinning out grand hypotheses about how things might be. You will doubtless note some redundancy in acknowledgement and bibliographic references in this issue. However, we decided to let those stand in order to insure that the actual report would be intact if used independently.

Some of our gratitude with respect to the process of producing the Report and now "Interdisciplinary Resources" is indicated within the report, but I'll close with a specific personal note: participation in this project has been one of the most significant academic activities of a career that began in 1965. Again and again I've taken what I've learned in the AAC training sessions or along the way of studying interdisciplinary programs right on to a university committee meeting or to a panel or consultation elsewhere. That sort of growth or deepening of perspective seems endemic to this sort of collaborative work, and I hope other faculty members across the country can be involved in the sort of work that is sponsored by AAC and other groups, such as the FIPSE-sponsored project we've just finished on Institutionalizing Interdepartmental Humanities Programs (see Mark E. Clark and Roger Johnson, Jr, eds., *Curricular Reform: Narratives of Interdisciplinary Humanities Programs* (Chattanooga: Southern Humanities Council Press, 1991). Such interdisciplinary collaboration ought to be regarded as part of the "scholarship of service" that Ernest L. Boyer talks about in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Carnegie Foundation, 1990): academic "service" ought not mean Rotary or Unicef, but genuine contribu-

tions that claim hours otherwise spent on disciplinary research that would lead to the usual forms of accredited academic publications.

Academics too readily relegate the crucial design and supervision of their own programs to harried administrators whose professional commitments have to be splintered into a thousand competing sectors. Seldom do the various interdisciplinary programs on a campus (as we point out in the Report) collaborate to present college administrators with a stronger combined program than any could develop separately. We'll note little progress in solving the contemporary problems of higher education until the professoriate returns sizeable portions of energy to issues of pedagogy and the overall intellectual atmosphere of our campuses — often having to fly in the face of the structural requirements imposed by professional and disciplinary organizations, or the orientation that exepcts one's "research" to be rewarded with fewer teaching hours.

Repeatedly we recognize that the way persons outside academia operate — persons whom academics train for the supposedly real world — bear little resemblance to the "math at 8, English at 9, geology at 10" approach of the college curriculum. Instead "real" people work increasingly in teams and in collaboration, even if it is only in terms of sharing equipment or data or computer resources. I'd like to think that the future college graduate might come to be trained for truly integrative sharing of knowledge and collaborative evaluation, rather than for the divisive and competitive model that so often rules the contemporary classroom and professional academic organization. Persons reading "Interdisciplinary Resources" are in positions to see that some of that integrative sharing gets inculcated and replicated across the American collegiate landscape, and I think the proof of the pudding baked in this particular report will be readily obvious just a decade or so down the road, if its findings and recommendations are widely heeded.

Biographical Note: William G. Doty is professor of religious studies at the University of Alabama/Tuscaloosa. He has published some thirteen books and over seventy essays in a wide range of journals, and has just received the Drew University Distinguished Alumni Award for 1991. A frequent lecturer and consultant on college campuses, he is currently completing a follow-up volume to *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* and a work on myths of masculinity.