



INSTITUUT VOOR INTERDISCIPLINAIRE STUDIES

Report of a visit to the annual Association of Integrative Studies conference, Tuscaloosa (AL) & New College at the University of Alabama; October 7-11, 2009.

(Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands; www.iis.uva.nl , report written by: Machiel Keestra: m.keestra@uva.nl)

“Creativity and Play across the Disciplines” – 31st annual Association of Integrative Studies conference

(As the conference <http://aisconference.ua.edu/agenda.html> included ca. fifty parallel sessions, each consisting of ca. three presentations, this unrepresentative selection of reported papers pretends to be no more than an impression. I do hope that for the absentees it may provide a stimulus to acquire direct experiences at the next AIS conference in San Diego, October 7-10, 2010.)

Session ‘Economics and interdisciplinarity’

The Enterprising Enterprise

Erik Guznik, U of science and arts of Oklahoma

In recent years studies aimed at economic success of regions or of firms have focused on creativity and problem solving. However, notions like these are taught in history of economics rather than in microeconomic programs, which focus more on output, efficiency, interests, etc. Due to these focuses, the importance of innovation and creativity for these factors are underestimated in microeconomic studies. Cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary studies can inform about aspects like the different stages where creativity plays a role (development, production, marketing, etc.) and the role of team-work & communication in fostering creative solutions, and the forms of organization of an interplay of ideas.

In addition to research literature and assignments, students carried out a small survey of local businesses and the role & place of creativity in those..

Creativity, communication , and capitalism: was Florida correct?

Cecelia Hale (Bevill State Community College; John Rees)

Based on a discussion of the works of McLuhan, Richard Florida, and Thomas Friedman, the relation between geography, communication and economic development was discussed. If creativity is depending on valuable, novel and surprising ideas (M. Boden), than it may be useful to create a community which fosters both a diversity of talent and tolerance . However, the role of communication –including long distance, digital communication- should not be underestimated. A topical subject is what happens to creativity in firms etc. in times of economic crisis.



Session ‘Problem solving and creativity’

Rebel without a home: the case of William Irwin Thompson

Michael Prydzia, Arizona State U

The definition of interdisciplinary or integrative study of the AIS refers to complex objects that require such an approach. Indeed, to cover the multifaceted properties of a complex phenomenon –including e.g. self-organisation, non-linear properties, being quasi-stable-disciplines may inform us on specific sub-systems. In addition, interdisciplinary studies may offer a more comprehensive and integrative insight.

William Irwin Thompson’s wide and varied career shows how a single person can collect the necessary insights required for such an interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, his interaction with renowned scientists like Bateson, Margulis, Lovelock contributed to that. Thompson suggests to consider the history of our culture in different phases or mentalities: arithmetic, geometric, dynamic and we entered postmodern/chaos-dynamic mentality. Mentalities now collide and are difficult to combine which makes a mentality shift necessary, according to Thompson. In his other work as a poet, Thompson reflects on these issues as well.

Mechanistic explanation and the integration of insights from the humanities and cognitive sciences.

Machiel Keestra, Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, U of Amsterdam (NL)

In his highly informative and useful book on the Interdisciplinary Research Process and Theory (Sage, 2008), five integrative techniques are being distinguished by Allen Repko. According to his analysis, the lack of recognition of the commonality between disciplinary insights is due in large part to their theoretical apparatuses. Consequently, many techniques for integration focus to a large extent on modifications of theories, concepts, assumptions etc.

Undeniably, these integrative techniques are crucial in many interdisciplinary research processes. Nonetheless, another integrative technique deserves to be added since it is in widespread use in the life sciences, and ever more in the human sciences too. So-called ‘mechanistic explanations’ aim to describe and explain a phenomenon by integrating disciplinary insights on its relevant (sub-)components. Taken together these, via their interaction, produce the phenomenon. Candidate phenomena for such mechanistic explanations range from climate change, memory functions, human empathy, to the social spread of rituals – each requiring different components, relations and interactions.

Interestingly, complex and dynamic systems like the human brain or social culture are flexible and adaptive and not rigidly determined. During their development or learning they are able to integrate external information, which partly eventually determines the mechanism. Consider for instance the imprinting mechanism: it determines the chick’s attachment behavior after leaving its egg, but leaves undetermined whether it follows a hen or an ethologist. The human brain’s mechanism is even more open to external information.

Integrating disciplinary insights in a complex mechanism, new insights are created, because components are influenced in their behavior by other components and are sensitive to contextual factors. These ‘multi-level’ interactions are often overlooked as disciplinary research starts by isolating a phenomenon. Humanities and cognitive (neuro-)sciences should therefore jointly contribute to the mechanistic explanation, for instance of creativity.



International participants' breakfast table

Although still in small numbers, the group of non-US visitors of the AIS conference is growing. A few Canadians and several European visitors attended this year's conference. The board of the AIS welcomes this development and is interested in investigating what the AIS can do to foster this development, what conditions need to be met to do this, what specific questions or wishes international participants would have, etcetera. An informal way to do this was this year's breakfast table.

With a small group of Canadian and European colleagues a diversity of topics was discussed. A few topics that merit mention and possibly follow-up are:

- perhaps there is room for continent-specific email lists on the AIS listserver?
- somewhere end of June (2011?) would be ideal for e.g. an additional AIS workshop/conference in Europe. Potential topic: interdisciplinarity and the role of the disciplines, as this is a challenging topic also with respect to European funding of research and teaching

(Non-US AIS-members or readers interested in further developments of this internationalization effort may want to send an email to m.keestra@uva.nl.)

Session 'Creativity and civic engagement'

Exploring the integration of theatre with community development

Hilary Anne Frost-Krumpf, U Illinois at Springfield

Arts are being used often as a tool in participants with civic engagements, for example to address issues of health, social justice, AIDS, etc. Only recently have arts organizations and arts schools taken acknowledged these artistic practices as belonging to the possible roles of arts.

Interestingly, in Tanzania artistic training involves more often the integration of social issues, civic engagement, etc. Theatre indeed provides the opportunity to create alternative representations of reality which may contribute to communal self-reflection. The Tanzanian 'Theatre for development' has a long tradition with such programs. Of course, in Africa there is still a rich tradition where artistic tools are used for the transmission of information, values, social behavior, etc.

As there are several aims similar to this Theatre for Development and interdisciplinary teaching (multi-perspectival thinking; critical thinking; sensitivity to ethical issues, etc.), combining the two could be useful. (Cf. David Sill: Integrative Thinking, Synthesis, and Creativity in Interdisciplinary Studies; J. Gen. Edu. (1996). Vol. 45, No. 2, 129-151.)

Promoting creativity through service learning in an interdisciplinary program

Corinne Miller, Caryn Neumann; Miami U of Ohio

In the Bachelor of Integrative Studies program, there is a service learning seminar. In this Service Learning seminar, the students can test and demonstrate their capacities as critical thinkers, problem solvers, communicators, collaborators and integrators. Moreover, the seminar prepares students for future professional and civil life, enhances their learning process, and allows simultaneously the university to serve society.



At the ‘Humans and the environment – ecological issues from a literary and historical perspective’ seminar, students apply and propose individually a depth study. They seek themselves an organization to work with. For example, a student did a project on recycling of prostheses of deceased patients with disabilities; another student got beauticians involved in a domestic violence information program.

Although the ca. 20 hrs. of community service itself may not require much academic work, the surrounding reflection (pre- and post-service) exercises include important requirements, useful for academic achievements as well. Moreover, they are required to consider their service from an academic perspective, consider contributions of academic expertise to the service, etc.

Community-based research programs in deliberative democracy

Lane Busby McLelland; David Matthews Center for Civic Life, U Alabama

Instead of learning students to persuade (a common academic activity), we should rather learn them to facilitate engagement in the community. Engaging the diversity of perspectives in the community is essential to sustainable decisions. A moderator needs to listen well, keep asking, facilitate engagements, etc. Students may learn to know the way to reach a good decision, but still often don’t know the specific contents.

The David Matthews center for civic life supports projects that are less ‘campus-centric’ but are more focused on the civic community or organization. Its programs help students to enhance their democratic practices such that they can function in the community by: creating public space, help naming problems, help framing issues for making choices, securing commitments of citizens to act together, to evaluate common projects, etc. Eventually, the goal of such projects is that such a community project can function without further involvement of students or the university. This takes ca. 3 years of involvement of our Center.

Session ‘The language of design, intelligence and interdisciplinarity’

Mathematical language, metaphorical language – ‘transmodeling’ the real.

Radu Bogdan Dicher; Illinois Institute of Technology

Mathematics offers us a language, a tool, which we can use to redescribe and analyze objects, experiences, interactions etc. In mathematical language we can abstract and compress and manipulate the information that is at stake in such cases. In that respect mathematical language may be compared to metaphors or metaphorical language. This is the more so if we consider forms not as fixed entities but as moments in a continuously changing world. In that case, mathematics may even offer us highly efficient tools to (re-)describe or capture such moments.

Mathematics offers us tools to form algorithms which we can use to capture or model the poetic sounds in a poem. By using those we can present those poetic sounds under abstraction from the many other aspects and readings of the poem. In architecture different aspects of designs can be disentangled by making use of such mathematical tools, for instance to model the moving observation-lines in a city landscape.



Computational creativity in interdisciplinary research: creativity by means of a non-creative process

Ruben van Doorn; Utrecht University

To study creativity in interdisciplinary research, it may be useful to consider creativity as a subject of (computational) modeling in A.I. research. Clearly, creativity in research is also knowledge related and entails some conscious learning and evaluating. Creativity in interdisciplinary research is always aimed at real world phenomena. The study of such phenomena occurs commonly along vertical –deep structures- or horizontal –context factors- lines. Interdisciplinary insights should be novel and useful, involve partial rejection and partial use of former insights, etc.

Making use of so-called ‘blending theory’ (Fauconnier, Turner 1998, 2003) we may formulate the creativity requiring task as a matter of blending different knowledge domains by way of techniques that build on tropes as analogy, similarity, identity. This is to a large extent a metaphor process with 2 different input spaces, leading to a blend space that includes a selective combination of the 2 input spaces.

Investigation of an AI-formalized form of conceptual blending. Such a process requires some previous seeding: giving some information to the program on likely relations between concepts. Evaluation criteria could be novelty and plausibility, and the program needs to be able to match and learn.

Interdisciplinarity in the Peer Review of grants

J. Britt Holbrook, Jonathan Parker, Steven Hrotic; U North Texas

Peer review is the normal process which ideally functions as organized skepticism, judging ‘decontextualized’ knowledge. Background idea is that knowledge evolves from basic research, through a reservoir of tested knowledge, into applied research, etc. Peer review should protect against interference by non-relevant interests and competitors. However, the ideal often does not uphold. Apart from the fact that expertise is no longer disciplinary but subdisciplinary –which is not always reflected in peer review boards- consider variables such as:

- self-interests and biases in academy, leading to coalition formations;
- autonomy of judgment without any form of accountability – how do we evaluate programs;
- non-linear evolution of knowledge, initiated by users rather than researchers, etc.

At the Center for the Study of Interdisciplinarity <http://www.csid.unt.edu/> a comparison between different peer review instruments has been made, involving i.a. NSF’s Merit Review Model, the NIH’s ‘dual peer review system’ and the Dutch Technology Council’s system. Common to those systems are their inclusion of not just research-focused assessments but also of assessment of the broader social impact of the proposal. Lay members were for that reason included in panels, for instance from patient councils or technology users. The Dutch even included experts from the corporate world in order to enhance potentials for research-business cooperation projects, after having first selected proposals purely on the basis of their scientific merit.



Plenary Lecture: Imaging America, by Timothy Eatman

In a very inspiring lecture, Timothy Eatman showed us the remarkable projects of www.ImagingAmerica.org. As most university research and teaching is focused on disciplinary work or applicable corporate knowledge, there is a large part of society unaffected by these. Moreover, evaluation and assessment of results are mostly in those same terms. Not surprisingly, therefore, a strong movement is visible in academe towards service learning, community service, etcetera.

Unfortunately, though, such intersectional and interdisciplinary activities are mostly absent from regular academic assessments and evaluations, for example for tenure-track procedures. Among many other initiatives, Imaging America has for that reason established a Tenure Team Initiative on Public Scholarship, aiming at the inclusion of relevant criteria in reviews that do account for such important activities, disseminations, etc.

As the team members have been selected from the nation's leading scholars, university presidents, etc., the Tenure Team Initiative is able to ward off the common criticism that recognizing service learning would be meant to reward those who are unsuccessful as 'true' academics. Of course, the aim is not to erect similar review and assessment procedures for this part of academic life, but rather to enhance its vitality and respectability.

Presentation: Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquire, by Joe Trimmer

Out of dissatisfaction with the highly specialized and disciplinary focused, rigid academic programs, from the 1960's onwards different types of programs and even universities emerged. Initiatives for environmental studies, living & learning communities, problem based community projects, self-designed majors and others stem from that period.

Nowadays, different arguments can be added. For one thing, a survey among CEO's learns that for job applicants their university transcript was found useful only by 13%. A senior project assessment was useful for 30 % of the CEO's. Most valued were the supervisor's assessment of internships or community projects in real-world settings: 40%!

These and other arguments were reason for the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry <http://www.bsu.edu/vbc/> to create its program format. Two seminars per semester, working with small interdisciplinary student groups and each supervised by 1 faculty, students engage in interdisciplinary, collaborative, project-driven and community based work. Faculty get extra time and credit to prepare, while students apply or audition to enroll. Every seminar includes community partners. The results are made publicly accessible in various forms. Topics range from theatrical explorations of the consequences of the Human genome project; investigating the handling of sexual assault cases in criminal investigations; studying the factors that contribute to success for private business starters. Some seminars resulted in video's of which some have even won awards.

Although the Center is selective and can accommodate only 60 students a year, the university aims at providing such an 'immersive learning' experience at all its 20.000 students. However, such a policy needs to meet several obstacles, like unflexible credit requirements, risk aversing faculty and students; resistance to product driven curricula, no experience with community engagement, etc. The Center's and its students' experience give reason enough to overcome these obstacles.



Interdisciplinary Research: Best Practices for Students and Scholars

William H. Newell, Miami U of Ohio; Allen Repko, U of Texas, Arlington;
Rick Szostak, U of Alberta

In a relatively open session, these three main authors on interdisciplinarity and board members of AIS, presented a variety of insights and arguments on interdisciplinary research.

Newell began by highlighting the need for justifying an interdisciplinary research model, aimed at the integration of insights. Justification from three perspectives was proposed:

- interdisciplinarity in teaching enhances the learning outcomes of higher-order and critical thinking, dealing with ambiguity, seeking balance of results and interests; it involves students' attitudes and engagement more than in disciplinary teaching, as it does faculty;
- interdisciplinarity has an impact on research as it acknowledges complexity while challenges for the integration of differences; it is more apt for bridging the gap between science and real-world issues, as it is for doing action research involving more than 1 perspective.

Szostak then emphasized that students can only learn IDS by doing it instead of learning it theoretically. He emphasized that students need to be critical of disciplinary boundaries –which per definition are hard to discover if one stays within disciplinary literature- and to investigate to potential contributions of other disciplines to the problem at hand. Or more specifically: some variables or causal factors may have gone unnoticed due to those boundaries. It is therefore important that students need to consider what should have been studied of a problem, instead of just investigating what has been investigated yet. Nevertheless, disciplinary contributions can be made to mutually reinforce each other as well, if combined and integrated prudently.

Repko started by noting that to some extent IDS research is similar to disciplinary research. In each case students need to extract from readings etc. the critical pieces of information that invites integration or withstand integration. They need to identify the author's selling point and identify the underlying method and assumptions – perhaps by using a data-management table. Then they need to look for common ground in order to resolve existing conflicts, by 'drilling deep enough'. This common ground needs to be discovered before integration can be achieved. Two forms of integration can be distinguished: partial integration, which involves some but not all the relevant theories/concepts/assumptions, and a full integration which involves all relevant ones. Of course, often a partial integration will have been obtained before a full integration is reached. Different strategies for achieving integration can be distinguished, which aim more specifically at issues of semantics, theories, assumptions and concepts of the different insights.

Teaching with Repko (2008): Creative teaching of interdisciplinary research to undergraduates

Tracy Zeman, U Illinois at Springfield; Rick Szostak, U Alberta (CA); Marilyn Tayler, Montclair State U; Ria van der Lecq, Utrecht U (NL); James Welch, U Texas at Arlington; Bernard Kruithof, U Amsterdam (NL).

All speakers used Allen Repko's 2008 book on 'Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory' as a course guide. Interestingly, there was a variety of levels and kinds of courses that were using this book. There was consensus about the fact that the book requires a course in



which the students apply the book's guide for doing interdisciplinary research themselves. If this is being done with 1st year students, the teacher may need to 'translate' some of the concepts and perspectives offered in the book. For more senior students the book will speak more for itself.

All courses were similar to the extent that they were focusing on a particular interdisciplinary theme or had the students come up with a research theme for themselves. Clearly, this immediately is a crucial step as required by the book: define your research topic and justify the interdisciplinary approach. If students have large freedom to choose topics, the burden of supervising a large variety of topics for teachers is great. On the other hand, the book's '10 Steps' of the research process not only lead the students in an orderly fashion through the research process but also enable the teacher to get a thorough impression of that research process.

Another step that asked for specific attention was the demanded adequacy of disciplinary knowledge. For this, not only knowledge of the discipline but also some meta-knowledge about the discipline's assumptions, basic theories etc. is necessary. Clearly, critical thinking was adamant also at this step, even if 'only' adequacy is required. Subsequently, it was discussed whether always the results of reaching adequacy in different disciplines lead to 'conflicting insights'. Sometimes, the results can be seen as complementary, or allow a kind of integration not explicitly mentioned in the book, like providing a model, a mechanistic explanation, a scenario, etc.

Interestingly, a few interdisciplinary programs use Repko's book along their curriculum. Included in such a long-term approach could be a series of self-reflective assignments, in which the students –meanwhile fulfilling their major or in depth study requirements- reflect on the limitations of disciplinary knowledge with respect to interdisciplinary problem research. It was suggested to include even an 11th step, in the form of a 'debriefing' – for instance via a group discussion in which the process is reflected upon and suggestions for adjustments or improvements of the group's own research is made.

In sum, all participants agreed that the book lends itself for a variety of applications during courses or even during a student's study career. It allows teachers and students alike to follow the steps more or less freely, and to put in their own materials at wish. As not all case studies presented throughout the book are suitable for all student groups, news was welcomed of an edited volume in preparation of more extensive discussions of a wide range of case studies that use Repko's research process description as their format.

The challenge the humanities present to interdisciplinary epistemology.

Ken Fuchsman, U Connecticut; respondent: Rick Szostak, U Alberta (CA).

Traditionally, the humanities are considered to be critical, value oriented and considering questions like what it means to be human. However, definitions differ greatly and nowadays the demarcation to the social sciences, psychology, biology and other disciplines is unclear. This situation suggests that we may consider the establishment of a new field of 'human studies' that would replace the humanities, while extending the scope of the field and include contributions from those other disciplines.

If we would consider such a field of 'human studies', we come across some of the problems noted earlier by philosophers when discussing e.g. the relation between the natural sciences and the 'Geisteswissenschaften' (Dilthey). For instance, what to do with self-reflection and introspection, or with the focus on individual and personal experience, which are lacking in a natural scientific approach? Or similarly, with the epistemological emphasis



on ambiguity, fragmentation, plurality etc. in the humanities nowadays?

Nonetheless, it seems worth trying to formulate a field of 'human studies' akin to the earlier continental 'philosophical anthropology'. Acknowledging differences between forms of human existence, it may still try to formulate universal concepts about birth, death, sex, language, sociality, etcetera. At least, it would challenge our thought on epistemological and ideological issues that arise from such an interdisciplinary endeavour.

Szostak started his response with noting that any definition of a scientific discipline is extremely difficult, let alone definitions of 'social sciences', 'natural ~' or even 'human sciences'. This difficulty gets more remarkable still if we want to place philosophy in one or more of those fields, as all disciplines draw on philosophy.

If we consider a field of human studies, questions arise about including or excluding philosophy, history, aesthetics, religious studies for example. Methodologically speaking, many of those fields are nowadays more interested in quantitative analysis than they used to be, and other methodological differences have blurred as well. Than again, even earlier authors have suggested to combine introspection and selfreflection with other methods instead of relying on these techniques alone.

More importantly, from an interdisciplinary perspective the suggestion of incommensurability between disciplines must be rejected, as that would deny the mere possibility of integration. This is not to deny that many interdisciplinarians are sometimes naïve in their instrumental and problem oriented interdisciplinarity, while neglecting the difficult but crucial part of conceptual reflection on interdisciplinarity and its epistemological issues.

Presentation: Interdisciplinary Use of the Paul R. Jones Collection of Art

Amalia Amaki, U Alabama and Paul R. Jones.

In a dual talk the remarkable life, study and successful career of Paul Jones was presented to us. Being rejected as a student of color in Alabama in those days, some decades later Paul Jones was willing to donate his impressive and important collection of works from African-American artists to a university, see <http://www.udel.edu/museums/prj/> . However, the condition was that the university not only would allow the collection to be on show, but also to integrate it into its education. The presentations highlighted some university courses that made use of this interesting collection. A major program aimed at creating a large database of biographies of all the hundreds of artists represented in the collection. Many students have already participated by doing a project by carrying out research and doing interviews, finally leading to writing such a biography.

Session 'Theory and Practice of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning'

Inter-textual Analysis: Rewards and Dangers of Interdisciplinary Interfacing

John F. DeCarlo, Hofstra University

Sometimes, it can be insightful to present students with materials from two different perspectives that invite making comparisons or analogies between these two – although perhaps on second thought such an analogy may turn out not to be warranted. In this case, the



novel 'The unbearable lightness of being' (Milan Kundera) was discussed next to a Scientific American Mind (2008) article by neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga on 'Spheres of Influence'.

The novel's female protagonist, Tereza, makes many illogical leaps in her thinking about her attraction to Tomas and about the practical consequences this has for her. Gazzaniga discusses split brain patients and their peculiar and oftentimes risky decision making. Questions about correspondence between Tereza and the patients easily arose, as did many other questions: are we considering different language games here, or are there differences between laboratory situations and real life decision making, can we compare clinical materials with artistic materials, etc. Final judgment about the comparison would include a choice between: the comparison is simply interesting; the comparison is illuminating and offers us new insights; the comparison is misleading as the differences between the materials are too large. Similar judgments are perhaps relevant to make in each case of interdisciplinary comparison, as in each case we should avoid to get seduced by apparent agreements, or to step into the biases of disciplinary assumptions, or to read too much into a contingent comparison.

General Education: Connecting the Island to the Mainland

Kara VanDam, Kaplan University

Kaplan University is a large private for-profit university, with mostly non-traditional students without support and lacking much of the normally expected background. It is completely on-line and because of that attracts many disabled students. Its Core General Education consists of 6 courses. Important question is how to connect these with the other courses.

After conversations about General Education with disciplinary faculty the focus was shifted towards general education skills like communicating, ethical reasoning, valuing, understanding, critical thinking, interpretation skills, multiple modes of inquiry and creativity. Faculty recognized these skills as crucial also for their disciplinary courses, but at the same time acknowledged that their courses did not explicitly pay attention to those or trained students. So while they acknowledged that they all somehow relied on and used general education skills, they accepted that there is a role for a specific General Education Core curriculum. This curriculum, for its part, has sought ways to include specific and concrete situations and problems as materials for assignments etc. As much as each disciplinary course contains general education elements, so does the General Education curriculum try to bridge the gap with the disciplines.

Teaching and Learning in Interdisciplinary Higher Education: A Systematic Review

Elsbeth Spelt, Wageningen University (NL)

Interdisciplinary education aims at boundary crossing skills. A defining characteristic of it is the synthesis or integration of different insights. Nonetheless, across the literature there are many different descriptions of interdisciplinary thinking.

While using John Biggs' 2003 model of teaching and learning, the present study aimed at different conditions that contribute to interdisciplinary thinking. Conditions were distinguished as student, process and environment conditions, which in combination should be optimal. This model and its conditions were used to conduct a systematic review on



interdisciplinary teaching and learning (Spelt e.a. in Educational Psychology Review vol 21 (4), 2009).

Subsequently, the results were used in the amendments to a Food Quality Management program at Wageningen University. A main result was that students no longer just focused on food dynamics and technological conditions but instead integrated these with human dynamics and the administrative conditions that are also impacting on food production. Importantly, the curriculum acknowledged that students only gradually advance in these skills and that it should foster iterative research processes, including critical reflection on their own roles. In general, the review study leads to the advise to provide in the curriculum an overarching framework of interdisciplinary research as a thread throughout the program. This framework should include different phases and allow students to grow gradually as interdisciplinary thinkers.

(prior to the conference, New College was so kind as to allow us a visit)

Visit to New College, October 7.

(Meeting with faculty: Andrew Dewar and Jennifer Caputo)

Located recently in the splendid Lloyd Hall, the University of Alabama (28.000 students) at Tuscaloosa present in its New College an interdisciplinary liberal arts program. With 9 faculty –most with appointments in other departments as well- New College has currently ca. 200 major students. The most conspicuous characteristic of New College’s program is the fact that it provided all students with the opportunity to complete individualized study programs.

Students can enter New College at different stages during their studies, although a late entry (during 3rd year) requires some extra work of them. The selection process includes interviews and a discussion of the preliminary study plans a student has. Upper-level students are involved during the interview process. Typically students will follow some New College required interdisciplinary core classes and some topic based seminars. Additionally, New College puts an emphasis on student advising in one-to-one meetings with faculty, helping the student to design his/her individual program. A student has to investigate what critical courses need to be followed in a disciplinary program as they will complete their ‘depth studies’ based on such a program.

At New College, students have the opportunity to do a research project. Many students will do a ‘hand-on’ project’, sometimes related to a profession they already know. Assessment will focus on nature and quality of the interdisciplinarity of the project. Although still in small numbers, some of New College’s liberal arts and sciences students will engage in science studies – more than in ‘normal’ liberal arts programs.

More info can be found at <http://web.as.ua.edu/nc/>

New College seminar: ‘Special topics: Water Ways.’ Teacher: dr. Julia Cherry.

This seminar is an interdisciplinary seminar, including text based teaching and assignments as well as field trips, music and film analysis. Admission is not based on preconditions and is open to New College students with different ‘depth studies’ programs. The small group –ca. 10 students, some absentees- consisted of students with as depth studies: holistic human studies; human experience & world; premedical studies; Sout-East Asian studies; political campaign management; wild life management.



The class focused on a chapter of ‘Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America’ by John M. Barry. Two students had prepared somewhat loosely a discussion of this chapter by picking out some topics. The unfair treatment of (former) slaves then was compared with the situation in the aftermath of Kathrina more recently. The influence of the press as a tool for both sides of a conflict was discussed. Finally, the teacher had the group listen to some blues which presented artistic expressions of the important events.



University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa’s Lloyd Hall, the seat of the interdisciplinary New College.