



**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON**  
**The Graduate School**  
**Office of Academic Programs**

**Network of Interdisciplinary Initiatives (NII) Informal Working Group**

**Recommendations for Action from November 10, 2005 Meeting**

The NII Working Group identified three core areas where action would significantly increase support for interdisciplinary (ID) teaching, research, and training at the University of Washington:

1. Faculty appointments, promotion, and tenure
2. Allocation of resources: indirect costs
3. Development and outreach

**1. Faculty Appointments, Promotion, and Tenure**

Faculty Appointments

- Build the expectation that the University will support faculty members as both departmental and interdisciplinary citizens.
- Allow all faculty members to allocate a significant portion of teaching, research, and service activity among units as they choose. This could be used to facilitate interdisciplinary work or disciplinary pursuits.
- Consider creating a “university-wide” appointment for interdisciplinary faculty. These faculty members would not be bound to a single department, and could participate in several academic programs. Consider creating institutional mechanisms to allow clusters of interdisciplinary faculty to propose new faculty positions.

Promotion and Tenure: supporting ID activity throughout a faculty member’s career

- Encourage the formalization and enforcement of agreements about research, teaching, and service expectations when faculty participation, including WOT and research faculty, is in multiple units. This could be accomplished by developing written promotion and tenure guidelines that allow recognition of ID activity. Note that such agreements need to be acknowledged and “taken to heart” by faculty members who vote on promotion and tenure, not only agreed upon by administrators.
- In addition, college councils and deans should actively formulate policies to take account of interdisciplinary activities when considering faculty members for promotion, tenure, and merit increases.
- If a faculty member spends significant time and energy on activities not in the “home” unit, representatives from those units should be on the promotion and tenure review committee. Similar to Dissertation Supervisory Committees, promotion and tenure committees could include a “Graduate School Representative (GSR)”-type faculty representative who assures that standards such as ID activity are appropriately considered during the process.

## **2. Allocation of Resources: Indirect Costs**

- Raise awareness that ID activity increases the net research revenue of the University.
- Assess the current flow of indirect cost funds and how they are allocated in various units across campus. The flow of this resource throughout the University needs to be understood before considering ways to revise policies that can build sustainability of resources to support ID initiatives.
- Allocate a percentage of the future increases in indirect costs throughout the University to fund ID programs. This would lessen potential conflicts over re-allocation of existing indirect cost resources.
- Incentivize collaboration among units by sharing the indirect costs rather than allocating all of these funds to departments/deans. This could be one aspect of University policy that consistently and uniformly encourages interaction across disciplines and guides the sharing of revenue.

## **3. Development and Outreach**

- Increase awareness that many ID programs are a natural fit for community outreach since they deal with the complexities and ambiguities of real-world issues. Programs in the health sciences, environmental sciences, and global education and research, all areas of strength at the University, would be effective in this effort.
- Educate development staff about the importance of ID initiatives and coordinate outreach with departmental development efforts.
- Assign a development officer dedicated to enlarging the pool of resources available to seed, support, and sustain interdisciplinary programs. Consider locating this officer in the Graduate School, the Provost's Office, or another program-neutral location. Currently ID programs "fall through the cracks" in development activities, since these activities are assigned to colleges, schools, and departments. Ensure that this officer works closely with units involved in ID programs to ensure coordinated development activities that benefit both ID programs and individual units. Consider identifying ID programs that can serve as "poster children" for how ID programs and initiatives enrich the University and community.
- Investigate whether the Washington State Discovery Fund will support University ID programs and initiatives.

## **Additional Comments**

- Bring the Bothell and Tacoma campuses into the discussion, since they have programs built on the principle of ID work.
- Identify how to best garner broad support as policy changes surrounding ID work move through the University.

## Signatories

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