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# Understanding Interdisciplinary Studies

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The Disciplines List is a functional list of all the minimum qualifications to teach in California community colleges, but it contains one designation that is often misunderstood. This one designation is included in the Disciplines List even though it is rarely a discipline in and of itself, but rather a "discipline" that allows hiring and curriculum committees greater flexibility in matching course content with teacher expertise and knowledge. This non-discipline discipline is Interdisciplinary Studies.

The two primary uses of the Disciplines List are

- 1) to assist discipline faculty, hiring committees and human resources in designing job announcements and recruiting qualified applicants, and
- 2) to assist curriculum committees in assigning courses to disciplines in order to guarantee that the most qualified faculty teach each course. The minimum qualifications listed for Interdisciplinary Studies in the Disciplines List are:

Master's in the Interdisciplinary area

OR

Master's in one of the disciplines included in the interdisciplinary area and upper division or graduate course work in at least one other constituent discipline(s).

The existence of this designation satisfies the need to require more specialized minimum qualifications than that of a single discipline or cross-listing of courses. Both hiring and curriculum committees are tasked to name the disciplines that contain the knowledge and skills necessary for the faculty member to be as effective as possible. Considering which appropriate disciplines to include for a given position or course requires input from the authors of the course, faculty and administrative leaders of affected programs, counselors, articulations officers, and others.

For example, a curriculum committee has approved a new course in American Perspectives and has named it *interdisciplinary*. After discussing the course content, it is determined that the interdisciplinary areas for this course include history, political science, philosophy, and anthropology. Qualified faculty will have a master's degree in one of the disciplines listed and upper division or graduate level course work in at least one of the other listed disciplines. For example, someone with a master's degree in anthropology with upper division coursework in history could be hired to teach the course. Note that the minimum qualifications do not stipulate a number of units or courses that satisfy the upper division or graduate course work requirement.

We also want to emphasize that the assignment of the Interdisciplinary Studies discipline to a course is different than cross-listing of

course.

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Cross-listing is the assignment of two or more disciplines to a course and a faculty member with the minimum qualifications for **any** of the disciplines assigned to the course can teach the class.

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If, in the example of American Perspectives, the committee assigned each of the disciplines of history, political science, philosophy, and anthropology to the course, then a faculty member with the minimum qualifications for any of the listed disciplines would be qualified to teach the course.

Local districts can adopt more rigorous minimum qualifications for any discipline listed in the Disciplines List. A district may wish to require that faculty qualified to teach American Perspectives per the interdisciplinary example above have a master's degree in one of the listed disciplines and upper division or graduate coursework in every discipline listed in the interdisciplinary area. Or it may decide to locally define the number of units or courses required of upper division or graduate coursework for the constituent discipline(s). While more rigorous minimum qualifications may be desirable, additional requirements often limit the size of the hiring pool and inadvertently cause disproportionate impact to the composition of the pool. Many districts instead list preferred or desirable qualifications to communicate to applicants the level of specialization considered valuable by the search committee.

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The Interdisciplinary Studies discipline, while flexible and clearly defined, often becomes the catch-all discipline for problem courses reviewed by curriculum committees.

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Study skills courses are great examples of courses that might fall victim-rightly or wrongly-to the adaptable nature of Interdisciplinary Studies. Can any faculty member at a college teach a course in study skills? Do all faculty have upper division or graduate coursework in another discipline in order to meet minimum qualifications? Are select disciplines more appropriate? Another situation where Interdisciplinary Studies can be perceived as an easy solution occurs when curriculum committees cannot agree on the assignment of a course to discipline(s). Then, Interdisciplinary Studies may be assigned as the compromise. We encourage curriculum committees to consider other options for troublesome courses, and the ASCCC Curriculum Committee may have other suggestions or solutions. Please don't hesitate to contact the ASCCC office for contact information.

The ASCCC 2004 paper, *Qualifications for Faculty Service in the California Community Colleges: Minimum Qualifications, Placement of Courses Within Disciplines, and Faculty Service Areas*, is an excellent resource too. It can be accessed at <http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/QualificationsFacultyService.htm> (<http://www.asccc.org/Publications/Papers/QualificationsFacultyService.htm>).

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