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# Interdisciplinary? What were we thinking?

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Wheeler North, Secretary

Have you ever been to the arcade where the water pistols are used to shuffle the horses along on a race? It seems like it is always the same two horses neck and neck for the win. If these two horses represented questions from the field regarding minimum qualifications, they would be named equivalencies and interdisciplinary. This article focuses on the latter of the two in a FAQ format.

*Are interdisciplinary questions curriculum questions or minimum qualifications (MQ) questions?*

Both – Typically these questions tend to spill into both areas. On one hand it is often challenging to understand what it means to meet the MQ of interdisciplinary, and on the other assigning a course to the interdisciplinary discipline is equally confusing.

*How does someone meet the qualifications for interdisciplinary?*

At a minimum the person must have a master's degree in one of the component disciplines and upper division or graduate coursework in one or more of the others. The qualification does not limit which component discipline must be the master's and it does not define how much coursework is needed beyond the master's. But it is a minimum qualification, so more or higher specificity is allowed.

*Which disciplines can be included in the interdisciplinary?*

While several of the master's disciplines in the Disciplines List do point to the interdisciplinary category, this was done because they are typically comprised of multiple discipline components. However, any two or more master's disciplines from the master's list may be included in an interdisciplinary course assignment. Thus a course on human moral development could be assigned to interdisciplinary studies with the components of humanities, anthropology, and history, thereby requiring a master's in one of these and coursework from one of the others. Curriculum committees are vested with the authority to best determine which components are appropriate for a given interdisciplinary assignment. Like any discipline assignment, this should be appropriate to the inherent nature of the course.

*Can someone have a master's in Interdisciplinary?*

No – At least not with that title because a degree so titled doesn't exist. While "interdisciplinary" is listed as a separate discipline, it is intended to be used in those cases where a college decides that faculty need to possess qualifications beyond a master's degree to teach a course so assigned. But there are exceptions, and therefore this listing is worded a little oddly. In the first part it provides for a "Master's in the interdisciplinary area, OR..." There are seven disciplines listed with the wording "see Interdisciplinary Studies" which are inherently interdisciplinary master's degrees (Ecology, Ethnic Studies, Geography, Gerontology, Physical Sciences, Social Sciences, and Women's Studies). Thus a course designed to prepare teachers to be qualified to teach in the physical sciences could be assigned to Physical Sciences OR the candidate could have a masters in one of the component disciplines such as physics or chemistry and upper division/graduate coursework in one of the others.

*Can a course be assigned to interdisciplinary and cross listed?*

Cross listing a course means that two or more faculty, each possessing different minimum qualifications, may teach that course. Assigning a course to interdisciplinary means that the faculty must possess qualifications from two or more disciplines. In one sense these two are opposites of each other because the former expands the pool of possible candidates and the latter reduces it.

*Can someone be deemed qualified through an equivalency to interdisciplinary?*

Yes – Although it might be a relatively complex analysis to get there. But, using the above example, a candidate possessing significant coursework and experience in physics, chemistry, and math could be deemed equivalent to a master's in physics and therefore also qualified in physical sciences because of coursework in the other areas.

*What if we can't find someone that meets these qualifications?*

If the course truly needs these qualifications, one option is to take a broader look at the overall program and see if there are other ways to organize the program structure so that no one course needs the more specialized interdisciplinary qualifications. It is also important to examine the motives for assigning courses to interdisciplinary. Just because someone has a Master's in drama/theatre arts with graduate coursework in economics doesn't mean he or she should assign a course to interdisciplinary to assure that no one else can teach it.

*Do persons possess California Community College lifetime teaching credentials qualified to teach an interdisciplinary assigned course?*

Yes – As long as the subject areas they have credentials for meet two or more of the component disciplines in the interdisciplinary area. They may also meet the requirements by having a credential in one of the component areas and upper division/graduate course work in the other(s). It is not uncommon to find those possessing the lifetime credentials to have a rather eclectic mix of credentials. As mentioned above, courses should be assigned to interdisciplinary because the course needs it, not because the faculty needs it. However there are times where such a course was designed, the program needed it, and the credentialed faculty was conveniently available. Then that person retires! Unfortunately the solution here may require a deeper look into the program's organization to make hiring qualified faculty a viable possibility once that person retires.

*Are you confused yet?*

Sorry about that. A philosopher might argue that a good question inspires a good answer but a great question inspires more questions. Many of the questions we get about interdisciplinary issues are very specialized and are too detailed to be answered in a generic format such as this. Thus your Academic Senate Curriculum Committee Chair and Standards and Practices Committee Chair are always available to answer those more detailed questions as they come up. Please write to [info@asccc.org](mailto:info@asccc.org) (<mailto:info@asccc.org>)

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