

# **BIS 300:**

## **Understanding Interdisciplinary Studies**

Fall 2009, Section 002

**Instructor:** Ellen Oh

### **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) degree program at George Mason University. It has two broad goals. First, through assigned readings, class discussions, and exercises, we will explore both **theoretical approaches and practical applications** of interdisciplinarity in today's world. We will look at the historical development of the academic disciplines in the university and exam the strengths and weaknesses of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking. Second, you will **conceptualize your own interdisciplinary goals** and begin to **develop your own BIS degree program** with an understanding of adult education theory. In working towards these goals, you will be expected to build relationships with the academic community, use technology, communicate well, identify and analyze problems, and gain an appreciation for the multiple perspectives in a university environment.

### **Learning Objectives**

- To develop a proficiency in the language and principles of interdisciplinary work, and **demonstrate the ability** to incorporate those elements into your own scholarly work;
- **To design and evaluate** concentration proposals, including your own and those of your peers (using BIS concentration guidelines);
- To develop an **understanding of the principles, guidelines, and procedures of the BIS program**, and affirm a sense of **identity/connection with the BIS community of scholars**; and
- To become **familiar with the larger academic GMU community**, both in terms of general university policies and procedures, and the use of appropriate resources, such as the library , catalog, schedule of classes, website, and other university publications.

### **Technology Objectives**

This class contains a technology component to facilitate your learning and familiarity with new methods of learning. During the class, you will:

- learn to use GMU's e-mail and Blackboard systems;
- find and use appropriate scholarly resources to learn more about interdisciplinary issues and to justify your proposed concentration; and
- learn how to use electronic media to participate in course discussions and enhance your learning.

### **Class Guidelines and Culture**

Participation is a very important part of your grade and a crucial contributor to your learning. While contributing to class discussions is central to participation, your grade will also hinge on

other important factors, especially **how you participate**. This includes your ability to fully participate in or facilitate class discussions, involvement in peer response and feedback, and regular contributions to on-line discussions. **The amount of participation is important but is less so than reasoned, ethical, responsible, and quality participation.**

Attendance is essential for success in this course. Absences or tardiness will significantly affect your progress, your grade, and may interrupt the learning of your classmates. Please let me know in advance if you must miss a class. If you do, you are responsible for the content delivered or handouts distributed. Please consult a classmate for any work you may have missed. If work is due on a day you will be absent, please e-mail the assignment to me by 7:30 PM that day or it will be considered late.

Most class periods you will complete in-class exercises that count several points towards your participation grade. If you miss a class and want to make up the participation points for that day, you have the option of writing an additional paper based on the materials covered. See me for details.

### **Required Materials**

- BIS 300 Course Reader.
- Rosen, L. (2005). *Academic writer's handbook*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Briggs Meyers, Isabel. (1998). *Introduction to type*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. (available at bookstore counter).
- MBTI Form M - **Self-scoring sheet**. (available at bookstore counter – **MAKE SURE IT SAYS SELF SCORING!!!**).

All materials are available in the GMU Bookstore. (Fairfax campus only).

### **Course Schedule**

This schedule provides a week-by-week framework of course themes, expectations, and assignments. **It is subject to change!** So, you need to keep track of any changes announced in class and posted on Blackboard.

### **September 3 (Week 1): Introduction and Overview of Course**

### **September 10 (Week 2): Theories of Adult Learning**

- Torff, B., & Sternberg, R.J. (1998). "Changing mind, changing world: Practical intelligence and tacit knowledge in adult learning." In M.C. Smith & T. Pourchot (Eds.), *Adult learning and development: Perspectives from educational psychology* (pp. 109-126). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. **Reader.**
- Rich, Adrienne. (1984). Claiming an education. In *Developing writers: A dialogic approach* (pp. 213-216). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. **On Blackboard.**
- Gardner, Howard. (1999). Who owns intelligence? *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1999, pp. 67-76. **On Blackboard.**
- Optional reading (but will help with writing Response Paper 1): Emotional intelligence – <http://www.businessballs.com/eq.htm>. Browse main page and links 'Multiple Intelligence' Theory and *The Emotional Competence Framework*.

**Last day to drop with no tuition penalty – September 15**

### **September 17 (Week 3): Understanding Learning Styles and MBTI**

- Briggs Meyers, Isabel. (1998). *Introduction to type*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

**Bring your 4 letter MBTI score**

**Last Day to Drop – 33% tuition liability – September 22**

**September 24 (Week 4): Introduction to Career Services & Disciplines and University Culture**

No lecture. You will meet at Career Services, SUB 1, Room 348 at 7:20 PM. Career Services, will provide an overview. Afterwards you may, on campus or at home, log into blackboard and read and comment on a minimum of two of your classmate's response papers. **Commenting is part of your assignment and will be part of your final grade.**

**Guest:** Ms. Tory Bustard, Assistant Director, Career Services

**Assignment Due:** Response Paper 1 – must be posted on blackboard by 7:20pm.

**October 1 (Week 5): Introduction to Library Services**

**Please note location for this class - Johnson Center Library Instruction Room 228**

The Johnson Center Library Instruction Room is located on the second floor of the Johnson Center Library in room 228. To reach it, enter the Johnson Center Library on the first floor, climb the stairs behind the Circulation Desk (or take elevator to the left of the Circulation Desk), and look for the blue banner that reads "Library Instruction Room."

After the library session, we will stay in the library instruction room for the rest of the lecture.

- Raspberry, W. (1990). College majors don't matter much. *Washington Post*, August 31. **Reader.**
- Augsburg, T. (2005). *Becoming interdisciplinary: An introduction to interdisciplinary studies*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt. Read pages 5-10. **Reader**
- Bloom, L., White, E., & Borrowman, S., Eds. (2004) *Inquiry: Questioning, Reading, Writing*. (pp122-130). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall. **Reader**

**Last Day to Drop - Incurs 67% Tuition Liability – October 2**

**October 8 (Week 6): Argumentation**

- Rosen, L. (2006). *The academic writer's handbook*. White Plains, NY: Longman. Read Chapters 7 – 10. Decide on a Citation/Documentation style (MLA or APA) and review appropriate Chapter (14 or 15).
- Rosen, L. (2006). *The academic writer's handbook*. White Plains, NY: Longman. Chapter 22.

**October 15 (Week 7): Non-Traditional Programs/Creating Disciplinary Intersections**

- Moretz, W. (1983). Non-traditional higher education: An outsider's view. In J. W. Fonseca (Ed.) *Higher education for adults: Non-traditional paths* (pp. 132-141). Fairfax, VA: George Mason University. **Reader.**

- Augsburg, T. (2005). *Becoming interdisciplinary: An introduction to interdisciplinary studies*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt. Read pages 10-11; 14-15; 19-23 **Reader**.

**Assignment Due:** Self-Reflection/Career Exploration Essay

**Please note - BIS is part of an interdisciplinary curriculum collaborative in CHSS that sponsors the Moments of Truth lecture. The lecture is meant to bring attention to interdisciplinary topics and address an ethical concern. In the fall we will be welcoming Harry Markopolos to campus on October 15. His talk will be from 3:00 - 4:30 PM in the Center for the Arts Building Lobby. Please try to attend.**

### **October 22 (Week 8): Interdisciplinary Majors**

- Repko, A.F. & Welch, J. L. IV (2005). *Interdisciplinary practice: A student guide to research and writing* (pp.43-50;108-119). Preliminary Edition. Boston: Pearson. **Reader**
- Boix Mansilla, V. (2005, January/February). Assessing student work at disciplinary crossroads. *Change*, 14-21. **Reader**

### **October 29 (Week 9): Library Research Week**

No class – free week for independent research to work on your Bibliographic Essay.

### **Elective Withdrawal Deadline – October 30**

### **November 5 (Week 10): Venn Diagram and Defining Interdisciplinary Work**

**Important** - Bring a copy of the course catalog to class.

**Guest speakers** – BIS Advisors

### **November 12 (Week 11): Interdisciplinarity: Pros and Cons - Reconnecting Interdisciplinary Studies to Self; Interdisciplinary Case Studies**

- Benson, T.C. (1998). Five arguments against Interdisciplinary Studies. In W.H. Newell (Ed.), *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the literature* (pp. 108-113). New York, NY: The College Board. **Reader**.
- Newell, W.H. (1998). The case for interdisciplinary studies: Response to Professor Benson's five arguments. In W.H. Newell (Ed.) *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the literature* (pp. 109-122). New York, NY: The College Board. Davis, J.R. (1995). **Reader**.
- Miller, M., & Boix Mansilla, V. (2004). Thinking across perspectives and disciplines. Interdisciplinary Studies Project, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Available at:  
<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/interdisciplinary/pdf/ThinkingAcross.pdf>
- Clark, T. (2001). Interdisciplinary problem-solving in species and ecosystem conservation. *Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Bulletin Series* (Number 105). New Haven, CT: Yale University. **Reader**.

- Klein, J. T., & Newell, W. H. (1996). Advancing interdisciplinary studies. In Gaff, J. and Ratcliff, J. (1996). *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 393-408. **Blackboard**.

**Assignment Due:** Venn Exercise with rationale paper **and** Bibliographic Essay

**November 19 (Week 12): Presentations (Group A)**

**November 26: NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

**December 3 (Week 13): Presentations (Group B)**

**December 10 (Week 14): Presentations (Group C)**

### **Assignments**

All assignments must be submitted on blackboard. Some assignments should be posted on Blackboard as noted on this syllabus and on the assignment sheets.

1. **Response Paper** (10 points)
2. **Self-Reflection/Career Exploration Essay** (20 points)
3. **Bibliographic Essay** (30 points)
4. **BIS Concentration Proposal Presentation (15 points)**
5. **Participation** (25 points): includes in-class exercises, class discussion, on-line discussions on Blackboard, Venn diagram, providing feedback on classmates' final concentration presentations, etc. **Absence from class will significantly affect your participation grade**

### **Please Note!!**

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the dates provided on the course schedule.

**Work will be reduced one letter grade for each day an assignment is late.** Assignments overdue by more than four days will not be accepted unless you provide official documentation of extenuating circumstances. To meet submission dates, assignments *may* be emailed to me before class.

### **Academic Honesty**

GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles must be followed at all times: 1) all work submitted should be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about what is appropriate for a particular assignment, ***ask for clarification***. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using someone else's words, opinions, or factual information without giving the person credit. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and **will not be tolerated in the academic setting**. Any student caught writing a paper for someone else or copying from another source (e.g. a published article) without proper citation will be reported and disciplined under the University's regulations. For more information, see:

<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/unilife/honorcode.html>

### **Grading Expectations**

The grading scale goes from A to F. What this means in practical terms is that not everyone earns an A or B. These marks are reserved for excellent or very good work—work that demonstrates

not only a strong, insightful grasp of the material, but also shows a high degree of complexity, originality, and independence of thought. As with all BIS courses, a C signals an acceptable but not impressive or thoughtful command of the subject matter. Assignments that demonstrate only a rudimentary or one-dimensional grasp of the material, or that show serious weaknesses or flaws in the analysis and presentation of ideas, will receive a below-average (i.e. a D or F) grade.

### **Grading Scale**

Final grades will be determined based on the following scale:

98 - 100	=	A+
93 - 97	=	A
90 - 92	=	A-
87 - 89	=	B+
83 - 86	=	B
80 - 82	=	B-
77 - 79	=	C+
70 - 76	=	C
67 - 69	=	C-
60 - 66	=	D
Below 60	=	F

Should you have a concern about the grade you receive on a specific assignment you should contact me within two weeks of receiving your grade for that assignment to discuss any issues.

### **Grading Guidelines**

Grading will be based on a cumulative number of points attributed to assignments and class work as listed above. Your work will be evaluated according to the following guidelines:

#### **A: Outstanding**

- Addresses the topic fully and explores the issue comprehensively and thoughtfully.
- Shows substantial depth, fullness, and complexity of thought.
- Demonstrates clear, focused, coherent, and logical organization.
- Fully-developed, detailed, clear, and well-stated arguments
- Evidence of superior control of diction, syntactic variety, and transition between paragraphs. Only a few minor flaws, if any.

#### **B: Good**

- Addresses the topic and explores the issue clearly.
- Shows some depth and complexity of thought.
- Effectively organized; easy to follow and understand.
- Well developed and logically coherent, with supporting detail.
- Demonstrates control of diction, syntactic variety, and transition; may have a few minor mechanical flaws.

#### **C: Average**

- Adequately addresses the topic and explores the issue.
- Shows clarity of thought but may lack complexity.
- Somewhat organized; ideas clouded by inadequate or illogical flow.
- Adequately developed, with some detail; some logical fallacies or incoherent sentences or paragraphs.
- Demonstrates competent writing; shows flaws in syntax and grammar.

#### **D: Poor**

- Distorts or neglects parts of the topic.
- Simplistic or stereotypical in thought.
- Demonstrates problems in organization.

- Offers generalizations without supporting detail or detail without generalizations; undeveloped.
- Logically flawed; several incoherencies.
- Reveals patterns of flaws in language, syntax, or mechanics.

**F: Inadequate**

- Demonstrates serious inadequacy in addressing the topic.
- Fails in its attempt to discuss the topic; illogical.
- May be deliberately off-topic; extremely difficult to follow.
- Incompletely developed.
- Mechanically deficient.

**University Resources and Assistance**

**Writing Center**

<http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

703-993-1200

Robinson A 114

The Writing Center provides tutors who can help you develop ideas and revise papers at no charge. It can sometimes accommodate walk-ins, but generally it is best to call for an appointment. The services of the Writing Center are also available online.

**Disability Resource Center**

[www.gmu.edu/student/drc/](http://www.gmu.edu/student/drc/)

703-993-2474

SUB I, Room 222

The Disability Resource Center assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. If you have a disability documented by the Disability Resource Center that requires special conditions for exams or other writing assignments, please see me the first week of classes.

**NCC On-line Writing Guide for Students**

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/>

Topics include essay exams, choosing a topic, narrowing focus, research strategies, research writing, documentation, online writing, portfolio & reflective writing, presentations, resumes, collaboration, plagiarism, research guides, and Web resources.

**GMU Libraries**

<http://library.gmu.edu>

The GMU Libraries employ Librarians who serve can help you find information to support your project. Each Librarian is a subject specialist and can help with research topics of any area or discipline. The Library's web site provides electronic access to journal databases and many other resources.

**GMU Career Services**

<http://careers.gmu.edu/>

Career Services offers career education and planning, internship opportunities, resume service, job search assistance, and graduate school application preparation. They have an extensive library of print and online resources, and offer a number of interesting workshops.