**BIS 300: Understanding Interdisciplinary Studies**

Fall 2019, August 26 – December 18 (begins August 27)

Section 2: Tuesdays 4:30 – 7:10pm, Innovation Hall 333

**Instructor**: Richard Christ (“Rick”) – [**rchrist9@gmu.edu**](mailto:rchrist9@gmu.edu)

**Office Hours**: By appointment only, BIS Offices, Enterprise Hall Room 300

**Cell**: 703-975-8394 (please always text before calling; let me know who you are)

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) degree program at George Mason University. It has three broad goals.

* First, through assigned readings, class discussions, and exercises, we will explore both theoretical approaches and practical applications of interdisciplinarity. We will look at the historical development of academic disciplines in the university and examine 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 toward 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.
* Third, you will practice and develop increased skill in academic writing.

**Learning Objectives**

* To develop a proficiency in the language and principles of interdisciplinary work and to demonstrate the ability to incorporate these elements into your own scholarly work.
* To design and evaluate concentration proposals, your own and those of your peers, using BIS concentration guidelines (see paper #4 instructions).
* 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.

## 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 Mason’s e-mail and Blackboard systems (<https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu)>;
* 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.

**Texts**

* Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual. 8th Edition, Bedford/St.Martin's, paper (spiral bound), $30. ISBN 978-1319057435. Try to get the 8th (2018) edition, but 7th edition will also work.
* Booth, et al. The Craft of Research, 4th Edition, University of Chicago Press, paper, $15. ISBN: 978-0226239736. Try to get the 4th (2016) edition, but 3rd edition will also work.
* Additional required readings are on Blackboard at <https://mymasonportal.gmu.edu/>

**Class Guidelines and Culture**

Class attendance and participation is an important part of your grade, and a crucial contributor to your learning; your grade will also be affected by how you participate. This includes being prepared to discuss assigned readings, fully participating in or facilitating class discussions, involvement in peer response and feedback, and contributions to small group discussions. Attending all classes, being on-time and staying for the entire class is also considered in the participation portion of your final grade.

If you’re unable to submit work by the required deadline, please contact me immediately to see if alternate arrangements can be made. Arrangements cannot be made if you contact me after the deadline to submit work.

Electronic devices may be used only at certain times, and it is important that they be put away during class discussions, individual presentations, and group work times.

**Enrollment**

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. After the last day to drop, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the Dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

**Assignments (Total possible points = 1000)**

1. **Paper #1: Response Paper (100 points) Due Sept 10 (class 3).**
2. **Paper #2: Self-Reflection/Career Exploration Essay** **(200 points)** **Due Oct 1 (class 6).**
3. **Paper #3: Bibliographic Essay (300 points) Due Nov 12 (class 11).**
4. **Concentration Proposal & Presentation (100 points for paper; 50 points for presentation) due Nov 22 (load both to Blackboard by end of day on Nov 22). Presentations will be on Dec 3; the presentation is required to complete the class.**
5. **Participation (250 points): includes in-class exercises, class discussion, on-line discussions on Blackboard, Venn diagram, providing feedback on classmates’ final concentration presentations, etc. Please remember that absence from class will significantly affect your participation grade!! Perfect attendance: 50 bonus points.**

**Please Note!**

Assignments are due on the day indicated in the syllabus; **post to BlackBoard before class, AND bring a copy to class for the Instructor**. **Work will be reduced one half letter grade for each calendar day an assignment is late.**  Assignments overdue by more than four days will not be accepted unless you provide official documentation of extenuating circumstances.

**Revision Policy** (all rewrites must be submitted in hard-copy)

Papers #1, #2, and #3 may be revised up to an A (unless the paper was late--if the paper was late, the paper can only receive the maximum credit considering the lateness of the paper). If you want to revise a paper, you must first send an email to the instructor stating the *substantial* *changes* you will make to the focus, support, approach, and/or organization of your paper, and why you will make these changes, and request permission to submit a rewrite. ***Simply fixing typos, format and grammar-related issues does not constitute a revision.*** If you do not request and receive advance permission to submit a rewrite, your rewrite will be returned with no grade change. If you submit a rewrite you must also attach the original version of the paper. ***Submitting a revision in no way guarantees a better grade; you must effectively address the concerns in my comments to improve your grade.*** You must submit the rewrite at the class period following the class in which original papers were returned in order to be considered.

**Grading Expectations**

The grading scale goes from A+ to F. In practical terms this means that not everyone earns an A or B. These grades are reserved for excellent or very good work, demonstrating not only a strong, insightful grasp of the material, but also 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:

980 - 1000 = A+ 870 - 899 = B+ 770 - 799 = C+

930 - 979 = A 830 - 869 = B 700 - 769 = C

900 - 929 = A- 800 - 829 = B- 670 - 699 = C-

600 - 669 = D Below 600 = F

**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 grammar, spelling, formatting 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.

**Academic Honesty**

GMU has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles must be followed at all times.

* All work submitted should be your own.
* When using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations.
* 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 theft 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: <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/full-honor-code-document/>.

**Course Schedule**

Unit *I: Theories of Adult Learning, College Writing, and a Welcome to GMU*

**Class 1 (8/27):** *Introductions and Course Overview*: Syllabus overview, Introduce yourselves and what brings you to BIS; introduction to the Instructor, Blackboard and Paper #1.

**Class 2 (9/3):** *Theories of Adult Learning and Paper #1*: **Start with overview of services by the Writing Center’s tutors**. Discussion of adult learning and ideas in the first 3 essays; Approaches to academic writing; Review rubric, instructions page and 3 samples for Paper #1 (on Blackboard) -- print and bring copies of all of these to class. Watch Intro YouTube videos.

* *Assignments due*: Read the three essays on Blackboard under Course Content (Bash Ch. 2 and 5, Torf & Sternberg; Gardner is optional). For each essay, determine the author’s primary argument and two ways the authors support their arguments. Take a few notes (for your use in our class discussion, do not submit to Blackboard or to instructor).

**Class 3 (9/10):** *Introduction to Career Services and the GMU Library*: Paper #1 due over Blackboard by the time class starts; **bring a hard copy to class** (3 pages plus citations). Bring a copy of instruction page for Paper #2; we’ll discuss briefly if time is available.

Class begins with a **Library overview,** **at Fenwick Library 1014B,** **starting at 4:30pm.**

Next, we’ll have an overview of Mason’s Office of Career Services, **at UCS Office, Career Resource Room (SUB 1, Rm 3400) at 7:20pm,** (researching careers, StrengthsFinder).

* *Assignments due:* Read the section of Hacker: *A Pocket Style Manual* on avoiding plagiarism either in MLA format (p. 110-113) or APA (177-180)—also bring that book to class. Finish Paper #1. Skim-read Booth Ch. 7. (may defer discussion of these to Class #4)

**Class 4 (9/17):** *Personal Strengths and Learning Styles (Career Exploration).* Class begins with a 1 hour StrengthsFinder workshop with University Career Services in our usual classroom.

* *Assignments due:* Read Booth Ch. 1, 2, and 7.Review of Citations and Effectively Integrating Sources, and avoiding Plagiarism (Hacker). Take StrengthsFinder Assessment by 9/13, and complete/post SF worksheet by 9/16.

*Unit 2: Defining Interdisciplinary Studies*

**Class 5 (9/24):** *What is a discipline?* How did disciplines come into existence? What are some of the strengths of disciplines? Discussion of paper #2 samples, plus instructions and rubric. Visit from the Writing Center, for APA and MLA writing workshops including citation formats.

* Assignments due: Read chapters 1 & 5 of Repko, and pages 5-10 of Augsburg (posted on Blackboard). Read two samples of paper #2 (to be posted to BlackBoard). Read Booth Ch. 5 and 6 (sources) as time permits.

**Class 6 (10/1):** *Defining Interdisciplinary Studies*. Defining Interdisciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity. How can we describe interdisciplinarity? Paper #2 due on BlackBoard before start of class today. Intro to Paper #3.

* Assignments due: Read Chapter 2 of Repko (on Blackboard). Read Augsburg pages 14-15 and 19-23 (on Blackboard).

**Class 7 (10/8):** *The Problems with Disciplines and the Rise of Interdisciplinary Studies*. What are some drawbacks to disciplinarity? How did those problems contribute to the rise of interdisciplinary studies programs? Start with visit from Julie Allstrom from the BIS Office.

* Assignments due: Read Ch. 4 of Repko and Augsburg pages 10-11 (on Blackboard).

**Class 8 (10/22):** *Criticisms of Interdisciplinary Studies*. **Start class meeting with Subject Librarians at 4:30pm in Fenwick Library Rm. 1014B. Afterwards, we will walk over to our classroom in Innovation Hall 333.** Discuss Benson’s criticism of interdisciplinary studies and Newell’s responses (point/counterpoint). Review of samples of paper #3. Intro to Venns.

* Assignments due: Review the two samples of Paper #3 on Blackboard. Read also the article by Benson and Newell (on Blackboard). Skim-read Booth Ch. 3, 4, 5, 6.

**Class 9 (10/29):** *Building Your Degree*. Thinking toward your capstone project. What constitutes effective interdisciplinary work and scholarship? What should instructors consider when evaluating interdisciplinary work? Advising by Kurt from BIS Office. More on Venn Diagrams.

* Assignments due: Booth Ch. 12, 13, 14, 16. Skim read Boix-Mansilla article.

*Unit 3: Interdisciplinary Studies Beyond the Academy*

**Class 10 (11/5):** *Making Your Major Interdisciplinary*: Discussion of Boix-Mansillia article.

* Assignments due: Carefully read article by Boix-Mansillia (on Blackboard). *For next class*…prepare for your brief Venn diagram presentation (3-4 minutes).

**Class 11 (11/12):** *Interdisciplinarity in the Real World:* Paper #3 due before the start of class, Discussion of Seligo, Luzer and Perlstein essays, and brief revisit of Repko Ch 1. All students will do their Venn Presentations; post by 5pm on Nov 11th.

* Assignments due: paper #3; Selingo, Luzer articles. Perlstein is optional.

**Class 12 (11/19):** *Interdisciplinary Majors and the Value of Interdisciplinary Approaches; Creating Disciplinary Intersection*: Discussion of the non-academic relevance of interdisciplinarity, and how these skills can influence careers and the work you do in your professions; presentation skills. We may revisit some intro videos from week 1.

* Assignments due: readings TBD.

**Class 13 (11/26):** Paper #4 due Nov 22, concentration proposal is also due. Presentations will also begin this week, time permitting. Post your final presentation to Blackboard by end of day on Nov 22.

**Class 14 (12/3):** **Finish all Presentations. Class wrap-up and key learnings.**

**Resources**

Mason’s Writing Center, <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>, 703-993-1200, Robinson B 213.

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.

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) has a variety of useful writing resources, see the main site at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> and note the specific links below:

* [Purdue OWL MLA Guide](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
* [Purdue OWL APA Guide](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/)
* [Purdue OWL Sample Papers](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/945/01/)
* [Purdue OWL MLA Formatting and Citation Video](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4917D9E21FA6EDFF)
* [Purdue OWL APA Formatting and Citation Video](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8F43A67F38DE3D5D)

Disability Services, <https://ds.gmu.edu/> - 703-993-2474, SUB I, Room 2500

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 the instructor during the first week of classes.

GMU Libraries, home page: <http://library.gmu.edu/> - 703-993-2240

The GMU Libraries employ Librarians who 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 website provides electronic access to journal databases and other resources. Library links:

* MASON LIBRARY RESOURCES  
  + [Mason Library Home Page](http://library.gmu.edu/)   
  + [Mason Library Workshops](http://library.gmu.edu/workshops)   
  + [Mason Library Tutorials](http://library.gmu.edu/tutorials)
* MASON LIAISON LIBRARIANS  
  + [Mason Libraries Subject Librarians](http://library.gmu.edu/liaisons)
* MASON LIBRARY INFO GUIDES  
  + [Mason Library Info Guides by Discipline](http://infoguides.gmu.edu/)

GMU Career Services, <http://careers.gmu.edu/>

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

Student Privacy, <http://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) is a federal law that governs the educational records of eligible students. It grants students continuous access to their educational records upon request, allows students to amend their records if they feel they’re inaccurate, and restricts how and when their educational records can be disclosed.

Counseling and Psychology Services, <https://caps.gmu.edu/>

CAPS provides a wide range of free services to students, faculty, and staff. Services are provided by a staff of professional clinical psychologists, social workers, counselors, learning specialists, and psychiatric assistants.

**Printing in Innovation Hall**

Print any papers due before class begins and bring your hard copy to class!  To use the print station inside the computer lab/group work area on the third floor of Innovation Hall, you will need to add money to your Mason ID card for printing by going to [http://masonmoney.gmu.edu](http://masonmoney.gmu.edu/). You can then use a credit card to add Mason Money to your ID.

**Building Presentation Slides**

If you need help putting together a presentation, the following links may be helpful:

* [GMU Computer Labs](https://its.gmu.edu/service/computer-labs/) Johnson Center 342, Innovation Hall 301
* [Collaborative Learning Hub GMU](https://its.gmu.edu/service/club/) Johnson Center 311
* [GMU ITS Service Catalog](https://its.gmu.edu/find-a-service/)
* [PowerPoint in the Classroom](http://www.actden.com/pp2007/)
* [Microsoft Power Point Tutorials](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/PowerPoint-training-40e8c930-cb0b-40d8-82c4-bd53d3398787?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)
* [PowerPoint 2010 Tutorials](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNtEcD6U-ew) (videos 1-6)
* [PowerPoint 2010 Crash Course](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQlkhkbVhj4)(videos 1-8)
* [How to get started with Prezi](https://prezi.com/support/article/steps/get-started-with-prezi/)

**GMU Diversity Statement**

George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis on diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity promotes a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason’s commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY**

The Mason Alert system provides emergency information of various sorts. Students may sign up for it by visiting the website <https://alert.gmu.edu/>. Emergency posters are displayed in each classroom explaining what to do in the event of crises. Additional information about emergency procedures can be found on the GMU website noted above.